

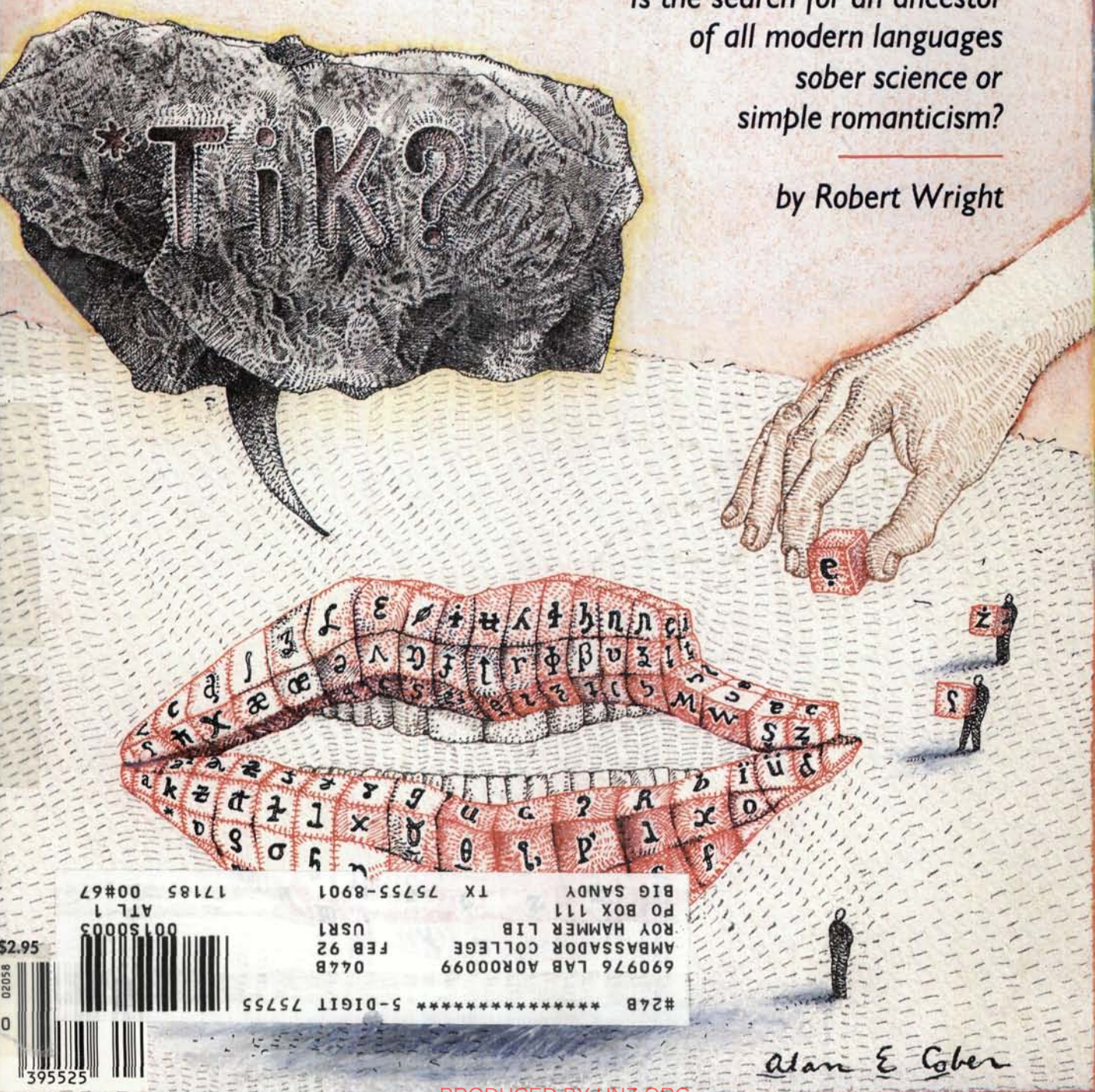
The Atlantic

AN ESSAY BY NICHOLSON BAKER / THE ROBERT JOHNSON LEGACY

QUEST FOR THE MOTHER TONGUE

Is the search for an ancestor
of all modern languages
sober science or
simple romanticism?

by Robert Wright



Alan E. Cober

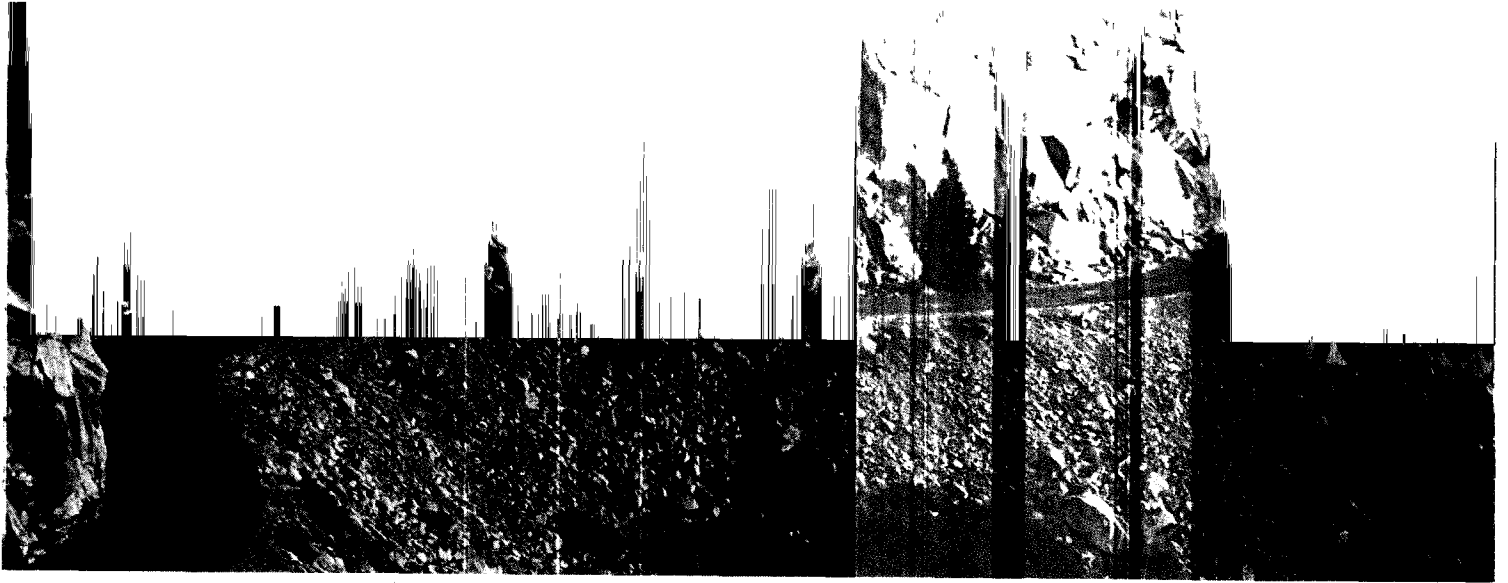
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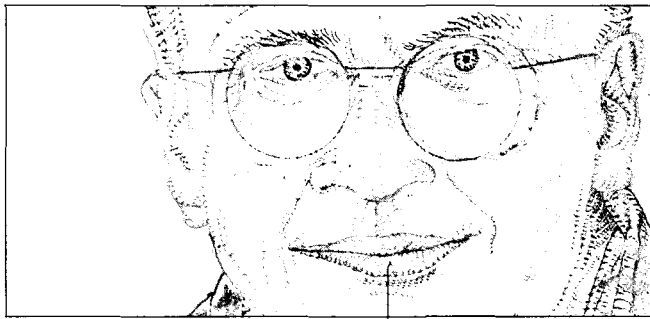
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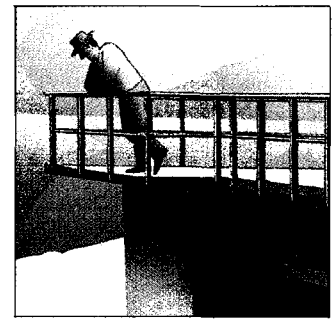
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Vitaly Shevoroshkin does not look like a guerrilla leader. "A more plausible guess as to his occupation," the author writes, "would be: leader of a philosophical school whose upshot is unmitigated despair." But Shevoroshkin is largely responsible for an insurrection in the world of comparative linguistics. Unlike most of his colleagues, he believes that all the great language families are descended from a common tongue. And he believes that parts of this tongue can be reconstructed.

by ROBERT WRIGHT

70 STRONG BUT SENSITIVE

Concrete is cheap, versatile, almost unbelievably plentiful—a ton is produced every year for each human being on the planet—and getting better all the time. But it is not indestructible. When engineers warn of "infrastructural decay" in America, and economists warn of a \$3.3 billion "infrastructural deficit," crumbling concrete is much of what's on their mind, and little attention is being given to who will pay to fix it. Herewith a scientific and social picture of a material that is all around us and rarely noticed, let alone given its due.

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*Cover illustration by
Alan F. Cober*



I BEAT HIM at the country club. The grass was *too long*. I beat him at Pebble Beach. The grass was *too short*. I beat him at St. Andrews. There was a rock in the way. Finally, I called his bluff. This time, it was the FELT. "*How smooth does it have to be?*" I begged. Smiling, he held forth his glass of *Glenfiddich** single malt Scotch. I sighed. Tennis anyone?



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745 BOYLSTON STREET

THE BY-LINE THAT appears over the essay in this issue on the subject of concrete—that of John Sedgwick—cannot but evoke thoughts of an earlier era in *The Atlantic Monthly's* history. John Sedgwick, a writer who lives near Boston, is a grandnephew of Ellery Sedgwick, who was the editor of *The Atlantic* from 1909 until 1938. In his nearly three decades on the job Sedgwick transformed *The Atlantic* from a somewhat genteel literary journal into a modern general-interest magazine.

Ellery Sedgwick was born in 1872 in New York City and passed most of his youth at the Sedgwick family seat, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The Sedgwick family was well connected and well traveled, and it possessed a pronounced literary bent. Even punishments in the Sedgwick family had a literary flavor: Ellery was once made to memorize Adam's "Morning Hymn" from *Paradise Lost*, after lacing pancake batter intended for a pompous visiting uncle with manure. Sedgwick resolved at the age of eighteen that he would one day become the editor of *The Atlantic*. He got the job at the age of thirty-seven, after buying the magazine from Houghton Mifflin Company.



Ellery Sedgwick

Sedgwick maintained *The Atlantic's* literary strength, publishing work by Robert Frost, Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, John Galsworthy, Gertrude Stein, Archibald MacLeish, and many others. But Sedgwick placed new emphasis on issues that would become familiar in the ensuing years: racial prejudice, inequality, communism, militarism, urbanization, immigration, birth control, divorce, the erosion of religious belief. He managed to add this new dimension—this element of currency, controversy, and public purpose—without losing the magazine's faithful core of readers. Indeed, circulation doubled and redoubled, surpassing 100,000 in 1919. (The present circulation is about 450,000, which includes newsstand sales.) In essence Sedgwick pointed *The Atlantic* on a course that it has maintained to the present day.

Five years after assuming the editorship of the magazine Sedgwick received a note from the novelist Owen Wister, to whom he had once divulged his ambition to bring *The Atlantic* forcefully into the new century.

"Do you remember when we last talked?" Wister wrote. "By God, Sir, you have done it!" —THE EDITORS

CONTRIBUTORS

NICHOLSON BAKER ("Exchange") wrote a long, brilliant article about John Updike for *The Atlantic* last year—an article so long, in fact, that we were unable to publish it. His article in this issue is drawn from that long article, which will be published this month by Random House as a book titled *U and I*. Baker is also the author of two novels, *The Mezzanine* (1988) and *Room Temperature* (1990).

GUY BILLOUT ("The Other Side") was born in Decize, France, and worked in advertising agencies in Paris before moving to New York to become a free-lance illustrator. Billout has received many awards for his magazine and advertising work, and has written and illustrated five children's books.

ALAN E. COBER (cover art) is a professor of art at the University of Buffalo-SUNY; this spring he is on leave, and is teaching at the University of Georgia, as the Lamar Dodd Chair Professor of Art. Cober has won numerous medals from the Society of Illustrators and from the Art Directors' Club of New York.

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FRANCIS DAVIS ("Blues Walking Like a Man") writes frequently about music for *The Atlantic*. His second book, *Outcats: Jazz Composers, Instrumentalists, and Singers*, was published last year.

PETER DAVISON ("Caves, Crusades, and Cassoulet") is *The Atlantic's* poetry editor. His newest book, *One of the Dangerous Trades*, is a collection of essays, most of which appeared in *The Atlantic*. It will be published next month.

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ERIC TRETHERWEY ("The Listeners") is a professor of English at Hollins College. He is the author of *Dreaming of Rivers* (1984) and *Evening Knowledge*, to be published this month.

ROBERT WRIGHT ("Quest for the Mother Tongue") is a senior editor of *The New Republic*. Wright is the author of *Three Scientists and Their Gods* (1988), a portion of which was *The Atlantic's* cover story ("Did the Universe Just Happen?") in April of 1988.

The April Almanac was compiled with the assistance of Gail Cleere, on behalf of the U.S. Naval Observatory; Ted Moncreiff; and Bill Deane, of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

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A place so attractive, even the



Pulled swiftly
over sandbars,
setting boats a bobbing, under
barnacle-encrusted posts of
wooden wharves, advancing a
foot every seven seconds, like
clockwork, the sea tumbles
against the chalky, red cliffs.

Newfoundland. Nova Scotia.
New Brunswick. And Prince
Edward Island, a magical place
that brought the fabled Anne of
Green Gables to life.

*"I've always heard Prince
Edward Island is the prettiest
place in the world, and I used to
imagine I was living here, but
never really expected I would."*

*"It's the first thing I ever saw
that couldn't be improved upon by
imagination."*

Canada's seaboard provinces
have long been tide (pun intended)
by the forces of the Atlantic, shap-
ing land and lore alike.

Norse sagas tell of Leif the
Lucky and other Viking visitors
who were the first from the Old
World to take to this region. Later,
Captain Kidd found it the perfect
hideaway to stash his loot. (No,
we haven't spotted the "X" yet.)

And it's here the French built



Louisbourg, a fortress so large –
and expensive – that Louis XIV
himself complained, "I should
be able to see it from here."

Though the power-
ful British soon
caught wind and,
flintlock muskets
flailing, corps-a-
corps, were determined to bid
Louis' good chaps adieu.

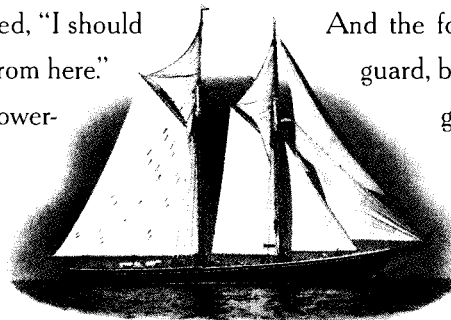
By George, we've come a long
way. Oh certainly, the Viking

sod houses are still nestled in the
grassy knolls of Newfoundland.

And the fortresses remain on
guard, but happily the

garrison, sailors and
townsfolk (living
just as they were)
are leagues more
receptive.

Ferry among fjords, whales
and great flocks of puffins, within
a patchwork quilt of seaside
communities.



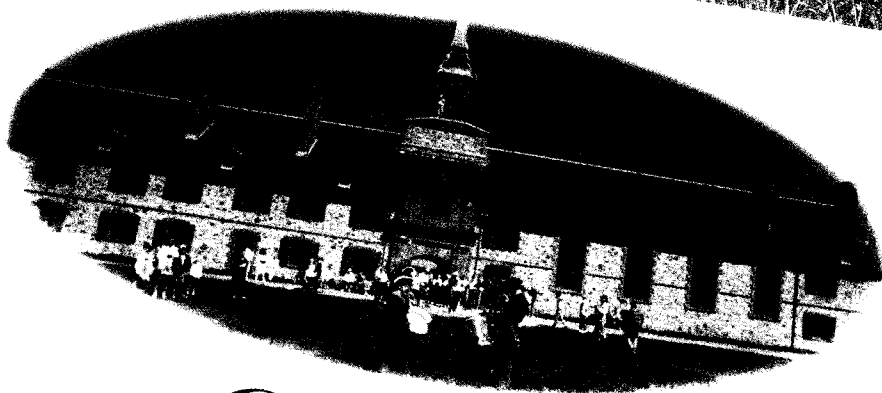
ean visits twice a day.



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And yes, you *can* stay on the irresistibly wonderful island Anne of Green Gables so gratefully called home.

"It's delightful when your imaginations come true, isn't it?"



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The World Next Door

The Atlantic

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



A NATIONAL CARE AGENDA

Re Suzanne Gordon's "A National Care Agenda" (January *Atlantic*): I am an emergency physician working at a large hospital in Los Angeles. Like nearly every other public institution, this hospital has been ravaged by decades of a "national care agenda" urged by well-meaning writers like Suzanne Gordon who are free to "care" far from the front lines. The values built into that agenda have created a completely irresponsible society, where children no longer feel obligated to care for their sick parents. Instead, families have the luxury of dropping them off at the front door of any hospital. So now Gordon advocates that we pay families to nurture their own flesh and blood.

Gordon wants to blame the nursing and teacher shortages on a cultural environment that discourages caregiving. Any nurse or teacher who has worked in this city or any American city over the past fifteen years could explain to Gordon that while the general population's sense of entitlement and ingratitude has risen dramatically, a parallel moral and intellectual deterioration has occurred.

Almost all of this deterioration is directly related to a "national care agenda" during the past four decades. For example, in Los Angeles more than 100,000 gang members kill and maim so often that they have bankrupted our county trauma system. Most of these gang members were produced because this country adopted a caring welfare system that in effect pays single teenagers to produce illegitimate children they have no intention of mothering.

Every day drug addicts pretending to have medical illnesses come to hospital emergency rooms threatening violence against hospital personnel if they are denied narcotics. The nurses and doctors who deal with these vicious predators are the real victims of the

"caring" that defines drug abuse as a "health problem" rather than a criminal problem.

And throughout all social classes, including professionals, the plague of disability has undermined the work ethic. As would be expected, "back pain" and "stress" are leading categories of worker disability. Studies have shown, moreover, that the availability of disability compensation negatively affects recovery from "disorders" such as lower-back pain.

Gordon's care agenda would about seal the coffin on this country. She proposes six months' paid leave after the birth of a child, and more time off for such intangibles as "caring for a sick relative." The problem with Gordon's care agenda is that it begins with the bankrupting notion that people must be bribed to do the right thing.

The irony is that the true victims of our nation's caring have been those Americans who do actually care enough to show up for work and to raise decent families. We have just been through an orgy of caring that has decapitated our cities. Forty years of this care agenda has brought us to the edge of a meltdown; the dwindling class of care providers is now overwhelmed by the growing class of care consumers. Simply put, there are no longer enough hardworking, law-abiding, decent people to care for the much larger class that has been bribed into parasitism.

JEFF MILLER, M.D.
Rolling Hills Estates, Calif.

Suzanne Gordon's generally excellent article contains one curious statement that cries for critical scrutiny: she laments the fact that "as patients are discharged earlier and earlier from the nation's hospitals, family members are increasingly asked to provide for their complex medical and emotional needs."

Of course it is unconscionable to discharge hospital patients when their



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"complex medical" needs still call for hospital care. But just what does Gordon mean by "emotional needs"? Many people nowadays employ this sort of expression for what used to be called desires—specifically, desires for love, companionship, sympathy, and deep emotional concern. And who can be expected to satisfy such desires if not family and friends? Perhaps in the sort of society Gordon envisions, where people do not put so much time and energy into their jobs that they have little left for personal relationships, the ludicrousness of supposing that emotional sustenance resembles medical care in that it can be meaningfully provided by hired professionals would be obvious.

FELICIA ACKERMAN
*Brown University
Providence, R.I.*

Suzanne Gordon proposes an expansive series of economic initiatives (benefiting primarily an urban work force) for the stated purpose of allowing us all to be more caring persons. I disagree with the assumption implicit

in her proposals that the development and expression of a value as deeply personal as caring can be directly managed through legislation.

This question is raised by the authors of "Managing the Unmanageable" (January *Atlantic*) when they quote from the sociologist Robert Merton that purposive social action often has unintended consequences. This is a complex and subtle proposition, one aspect of which is a question of the limits of the efficacious application of law. The expansiveness of Gordon's legislative proposals and the intimately personal nature of her stated goal raise this question with unusual clarity. Unfortunately, Gordon does not even consider the question; in her essay she simply assumes that implementation of her proposals would produce the desired result without unintended or undesired consequences.

Embedded in Gordon's assumption that her proposals would foster caring is a further assumption that ours is a nation of frustrated caregivers caught in a web of economic disincentives that make it inordinately difficult for us to

be caring. I do not believe that this is a very accurate portrait of our society. In fact, the very premise of Gordon's proposals—that government must relieve and subsidize individual sacrifice in order to "make caregiving possible"—intimates a society of radically self-centered persons that contradicts her vision of a society of frustrated caregivers.

Realistic consideration of the individuals who make up our society raises the question of whether Gordon's proposals for "the time it takes to care for ourselves and others" and "the social and financial supports that make caregiving possible" would yield the desired result. Quite likely the result of a shorter work week, longer paid vacations, and her other proposals to provide more free time would be that individuals would become even more self-absorbed and less caring.

THOMAS A. ROSSI
Omaha, Nebr.

It's hard to argue against compassion and care without sounding like the Wicked Witch of the West. But Su-

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zanne Gordon leaves some major questions unanswered in her call for a National Care Agenda.

For openers, she ignores the most basic principle of the American system: individual responsibility. Moreover, she perpetuates the dangerous American myth of unlimited resources.

Specifically, I would raise these points:

1. If the time has come for national health insurance, we must be ready to ration health care on a cost-effective basis. We cannot possibly afford to make all procedures available to all citizens on demand. Also, we must question whether the public should have to pay for the care of those whose problems result from voluntary indulgence in self-destructive behavior.

2. The elderly present a difficult problem. Social Security and Medicare have far outgrown their original design, and we must adjust the system to accommodate current realities of increasing demand and limited resources. How much nursing and convalescent care can the tax dollars of younger Americans sustain, especially when ex-

pensive care often merely prolongs the inevitable process of dying?

3. Surely our children should be a top priority, but students must work harder and standards must be raised before education will improve. We cannot address the tragedy of childhood mortality, poverty, and neglect without looking at parental responsibility. Will we continue to allow mothers—and fathers—to produce children that are born addicted, children they cannot or will not support?

4. As a part of a farm family that still engages in sunup-to-sundown labor, I can't muster much sympathy for the poor American worker, whose diminished quality and productivity are reflected in our declining international position. A thirty-five-hour work week and a month of paid vacation? That's not what Jefferson and Lincoln, so vividly depicted in the same *Atlantic*, had in mind when they spoke of inalienable rights.

The United States became "one of the world's richest countries" in part through the "competition, independence, self-reliance, and aggression"

Gordon so disdains. What will happen if we degenerate into a custodial community in which all the talents, energies, and resources of half the population are required to care for the other half, unable or unwilling to care for themselves?

Compassion and care should be woven into the fabric of this nation of high ideals, but these words earn a legitimate place in the political dialogue only when paired with responsibility and rationality.

LUCIE ROBERTSON BRIDGFORTH
Northwest Mississippi Community College
Senatobia, Miss.

Suzanne Gordon replies:

Several readers fear that America's productivity and competitiveness would be dealt a fatal blow if a "national care agenda" were implemented here. The improved standard of living and quality of life that has resulted from social welfarism in Scandinavia, West Germany, Italy, and France doesn't seem to have driven firms based in these countries out of business. In fact, they are among the major



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driver's side airbag. Seems one good thing does lead to another. **The Accord Wagon HONDA**

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foreign competitors of U.S. manufacturers. Although employers in Western Europe have recently been resisting further reductions in the basic work week, they have long survived—and even prospered—with work forces entitled to far more paid time off than American workers are, and average hourly wages that are in some cases equivalent or higher. One reason for this is far greater investment in job training, research and development, and new technology in the nonmilitary sectors of their economies.

READING HABITS

I was astonished to see in Douglas L. Wilson's "What Jefferson and Lincoln Read" (January *Atlantic*) mention of the greatest Lincoln myth of all—the doomed impending marriage to Ann Rutledge.

William Herndon, referred to seven times in the Wilson piece, was Abraham Lincoln's law partner and later his biographer. In addition, Herndon was a very heavy drinker and unpopular with Mrs. Lincoln. As Professor David Donald writes in his essay collection *Lincoln Reconsidered*:

From twisted recollections of events more than thirty years past, from hearsay and gossip, from inferences as to what must have been, and from speculations as to what might have been, [Herndon] wove the fabric of the Ann Rutledge story, which he spread before the Springfield people in a long lecture in 1866. In lush periods of purple phrases he told his fellow citizens that Ann was the only woman Lincoln had ever loved, that as late as 1860 he had still cherished his affection for her alone.

Carl Sandburg, who succumbed to Herndon's tale in his own enormous work on Lincoln, later admitted that the Lincoln-Rutledge relationship was devoid of historical validity.

PETER GOLKIN
Evanston, Ill.

Douglas L. Wilson is a bit protective of Lincoln. More than his book learning "was a source of astonishment to his neighbors at New Salem." Postmaster Lincoln carried other people's newspapers and magazines around in his clothes and read them ahead of the subscribers. *Atlantic* readers who pa-

tronize the magazine while standing up at a newsstand are in the Lincoln tradition of self-improvement.

THOMAS C. LEONARD
*Graduate School of Journalism
University of California
Berkeley, Calif.*

Surely Douglas L. Wilson knows that Abraham Lincoln was from Illinois, not Indiana.

ANN SHERMAN-FLINT
Pacific Grove, Calif.

As Shelby Foote said in the recent APBS television series on the Civil War, Lincoln was "phenomenally intelligent, and did absolutely everything for effect." Other historians agree that his actions and writings from earliest adulthood make it clear that he considered himself a man of destiny. This would explain his selectivity in reading (in contrast to Jefferson's voracity). Lincoln read to generate effect, and he generated effect to cement his relationship with destiny.

To adapt Wilson's and Emily Dickinson's metaphor, Lincoln took the "chariot" of reading to board the "frigate" of history.

PHILIP E. ASZLING
Chicago, Ill.

Douglas L. Wilson replies:

I can understand Peter Golkin's astonishment at seeing Lincoln's love affair with Ann Rutledge given credence after having been banished from Lincoln biography for nearly fifty years. And I am aware that William H. Herndon has been in the doghouse among Lincoln scholars for just the reasons Mr. Golkin mentions. In those respects Herndon was like Ulysses S. Grant, but, like Grant, he managed to make a considerable contribution nonetheless. Not least is the collection of letters and interviews that Herndon solicited from scores of people who knew Lincoln, which forms the basis for much of what is known about Lincoln's early life. David Donald's survey of this testimony led him to the conclusion cited by Mr. Golkin, but in editing these documents for publication with Rodney O. Davis, I have come to a very different estimate of what they tell us, about the Ann Rutledge affair and many other matters. I invite Mr. Golkin and others like him to read the documents, which will be published

for the first time in their entirety by the University of Illinois Press, and decide for themselves.

As for Ann Sherman-Flint's astonishment, Illinois is indeed the Land of Lincoln, but its favorite son was not a native; he was born in Kentucky and grew to manhood in southwestern Indiana.

MANAGING SCIENCE

"Managing the Unmanageable," by Robert P. Crease and Nicholas P. Samios (January *Atlantic*), was not about the management of basic science at all; rather, it was a special-interest attempt to explain away the irrelevance of most of the Department of Energy laboratory establishment by blaming the laboratories' troubles on governmental mismanagement. No, the answer to the "mismanagement" of these establishments is to return them to their original, and proper, tasks.

The DOE laboratories were set up during the Second World War specifically to design and produce atomic bombs, and were expanded after the war to develop later generations of atomic explosives and nuclear reactors for propulsion. Most of the "basic science" required for this engineering work was done in university laboratories all over the world before the war, and is done there now.

Their original job done, but with Stalin in the Kremlin and Teller in the highest government science councils, the laboratories prospered greatly after 1945. But with reactor design taken over by private industry, and weapons work requiring relatively less effort than did the development of the H-bomb, no one has had the will to shrink the labs back to the size required for the design and production of weapons. Although this job may properly be the responsibility of a government lab, it is not clear how much else of what the labs are trying to do is. If one is interested in helping Silicon Valley compete with the Japanese, as DOE laboratories in Livermore and Wisconsin are, one should ask what the cost-performance ratio is for use of their atomic scientists, relative to that for the semiconductor specialists at the Sematech consortium, AT&T, and IBM, and the professors and students

in American universities. At least *ask*.

Closing the national laboratories is like closing military bases: both provide a lot of jobs, and therefore represent a lot of political clout. Perhaps the best answer to their "mismanagement" would be to distribute the scientists involved to private industry while subsidizing their salaries for a transition period—and having their "science" directed by industrial managers familiar with industrial imperatives.

JEFFREY FREY
*Department of Electrical Engineering
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.*

I worked for thirty-five years at Brookhaven National Laboratory as a technician for a group of high-energy physicists, and I witnessed the slow erosion of the freedom they had to do their research. These men are highly intelligent; I respected their ability to make decisions regarding the public's money they were spending, their safety and that of those around them, and the protection of the environment. Back in the old days I could call up one of the lab's service groups (carpenters, electricians, plumbers, riggers, and so forth) for whatever service I needed. Now written requests in triplicate must start in the department office and go through a huge paper and computer mill before they achieve any result.

Back then the department had one administrator and a couple of secretaries. Now fully a quarter of the department's offices are occupied by pencil pushers. It reminds me of how we used to joke about how we could put our group's administrator out of business by breaking his pencil. Now there are new departments whose business is to monitor and regulate the environmental impact, safety, and costs of each experiment. Are they really needed? I think not.

DONALD DAVID
Brookhaven Hamlet, N.Y.

As a recently retired employee with more than twenty years' service to Associated Universities, Inc., I agree with the major points raised in "Managing the Unmanageable." However, I believe that the support of basic research by the federal government is much worse than the article conveys. There has been a loss of understanding of the value of basic research at nearly

all levels of the government as the science-management bureaucracy has grown. One need only examine the growth of applied programs funded by the National Science Foundation (the bastion of basic research) to confirm this.

Additionally, environmental, safety, and health problems at government-owned, contractor-operated laboratories have recently been recognized and are receiving increasing attention. Attempts to bring these facilities into compliance with local, state, and federal laws have resulted in heavy overhead burdens on basic-research program funding. In some cases the overhead burden threatens to reduce operating funds to below the minimum required to maintain a viable research effort. The Department of Energy is attempting by bureaucratic rule-making to pass responsibility for environmental problems to the management contractors without providing additional funds or granting the contractors authority to reprogram funds to remedy the problems, thus further eroding the cooperative nature of the operating contracts.

It is imperative that steps be taken in the very near future to address these issues. One positive step would be for the federal government to reaffirm its commitment to basic research by requesting and providing realistic funding for such research and by granting substantive recognition to the White House Science Office.

The environmental-remediation program is necessary, but its cost should be acknowledged in budget submissions to Congress. The national laboratory directors must be reassured that basic research will not suffer indiscriminately when they request adequate funding for remediation. If, as a result of the deficit-reduction agreement, funds for basic research are limited to some predetermined level, the laboratory directors, either as individuals or collectively, should be free to decide which basic-research programs to cut back or terminate in order to finance the environmental-remediation effort. The DOE must then be prepared to defend the laboratory directors' decisions before congressional committees.

This process would go a long way toward revitalizing basic research, reestablishing the cooperative relation-

ship between the laboratories and the Department of Energy, and appropriately linking responsibility and authority.

VICTOR D. BREMENKAMP
Alexandria, Va.

*Robert P. Crease and Nicholas P. Samios
reply:*

Jeffrey Frey is in error regarding the origin and nature of the national laboratories. The U.S. national laboratory system was set up in connection with the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. In a few cases pre-existing laboratories were incorporated under the act; most, however, were created afterward. (Brookhaven, founded in 1947, was one.) The reason for their creation was that certain kinds of research had grown beyond the resources of even the largest university. Particle accelerators, for instance, require joint institutional action to build; in 1954 a multinational collaboration had to be formed to build a European laboratory in Geneva, while recently in this country a new national laboratory had to be created for the Superconducting Supercollider. It is unlikely that this situation will soon change. Nature sets the scale.

Today more than a dozen national laboratories are in existence. Although military research is carried out at the Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore laboratories, nearly all the others have had virtually nothing to do with military research. Each has a different mandate, and collaborates with numerous other institutions worldwide to provide services that otherwise would be unavailable. Not only do national laboratories continue to perform basic research on a scale too large for universities but their work in creating and maintaining world-class scientific instruments pushes forward state-of-the-art technology and generates spinoffs for industry in the form of increased markets and reduced costs.

Our point was that the successful pursuit of basic research requires certain intellectual and institutional conditions. What is unreasonable is not that the national laboratories should be exempted from being treated like businesses but that creative activities of any sort—including scientific endeavors—should be treated like businesses in the first place.

THE APRIL ALMANAC



GOVERNMENT

April 1, by today the Census Bureau must have submitted to all state legislatures detailed population statistics (reflecting breakdowns by race and voting age, and shifts in population); these will be used in the process of redistricting. California, which already has the most seats in the House of Representatives, will gain seven more, for a total of 52; New York will lose three seats, for a total of 31. Also today, the U.S. minimum wage rises from \$3.80 to \$4.25 an hour. 2, Supreme Court recesses, until April 14; it goes into recess again on April 30. 15, federal and state income-tax returns are due. In California, selected taxpayers may opt this year to pay taxes by credit card. State penalties for late tax returns can run as high as 25 percent per month of the tax owed; for some people it may be cheaper to pay the interest on the credit-card balance.



Q & A

Why is a *strikeout* in baseball represented by the letter *K*?

The symbol *K* and its derivative verb—as in “he *K’d*”—are vestiges of an odd record-keeping system devised around 1860 by Henry Chadwick, the author of baseball’s first book of rules. Chadwick denoted the elements of play of statistical interest with either the first or the last letter of a key word; *K* is the last letter of the first word in the term “struck out.” Because baseball in Chadwick’s time was in its infancy and destined to change considerably, today’s scoring code bears only a faint resemblance to Chadwick’s. Besides *K*, only *F* (“fly-out”) and *H* (“home run”) survive from Chadwick’s original system.

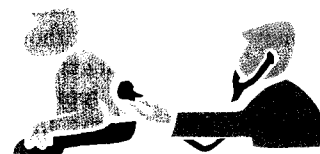
ARTS & LETTERS

April 9, Pulitzer Prizes announced. 22–26, more than 1,000 typists, it is expected, will compete in the annual National Typing Contest. To date the fastest speed attained during competition is 177 words per minute. Although word processors have been sanctioned in competition since 1989, no contestant using a word processor has yet managed to win. One reason, according to a contest official: “People tend to relax a bit in terms of accuracy when they sit down to a word processor, and each error costs a contestant two points.” Also this month the musical *Miss Saigon* is scheduled to open on Broadway. The musical found itself at the center of a tempest when the theatrical union Actor’s Equity prohibited giving the lead role in the play—a character who is Eurasian—to the non-Asian British actor who created the role in the play’s London debut. Actor’s Equity subsequently reversed its decision.

ENVIRONMENT

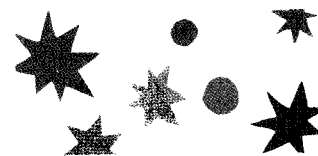
April 26, in most states this day, the last Friday in April, is Arbor Day, on which people are encouraged to plant trees. In last year’s State of the Union message President Bush pledged to provide money “to plant a billion trees a year.” Exactly how many seedlings have actually been planted is unclear, but the government has set up a foundation to recruit corporate and individual resources for tree plant-

ing. (Private efforts are also afoot: with the assistance of the American Forestry Association, most McDonald’s restaurants will give away free conifer seedlings during the weekend of April 13–14.) No one disputes the worthiness of planting trees, which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as they grow and can cool urban areas dramatically. But, as some environmentalists point out, brief, high-profile attention to greenery should not be seen as a substitute for sustained attention to major environmental problems.



HEALTH & SAFETY

April 27, on this day most of the college juniors who hope to attend medical school will take the Medical College Admission Test; this year’s test is a completely new one, and is designed to put greater emphasis on logical reasoning and communications skills, and less on math and science. In addition to answering multiple-choice questions, those taking the MCAT will be required for the first time to write essays. (Sample topics from an MCAT practice test: “Price is not necessarily a reflection of value”; “In politics, good intentions cannot justify bad actions.”) “The impetus for including the essay,” says Dr. Karen Mitchell, an official at the Association of American Medical Colleges, which oversees the MCAT, “came from a number of sources, one being reports from medical-school deans who felt their students could not communicate well either in writing or orally, and another being the criticism of doctors in general for being technocrats and not allowing patients to participate in their own health care.”



THE SKIES

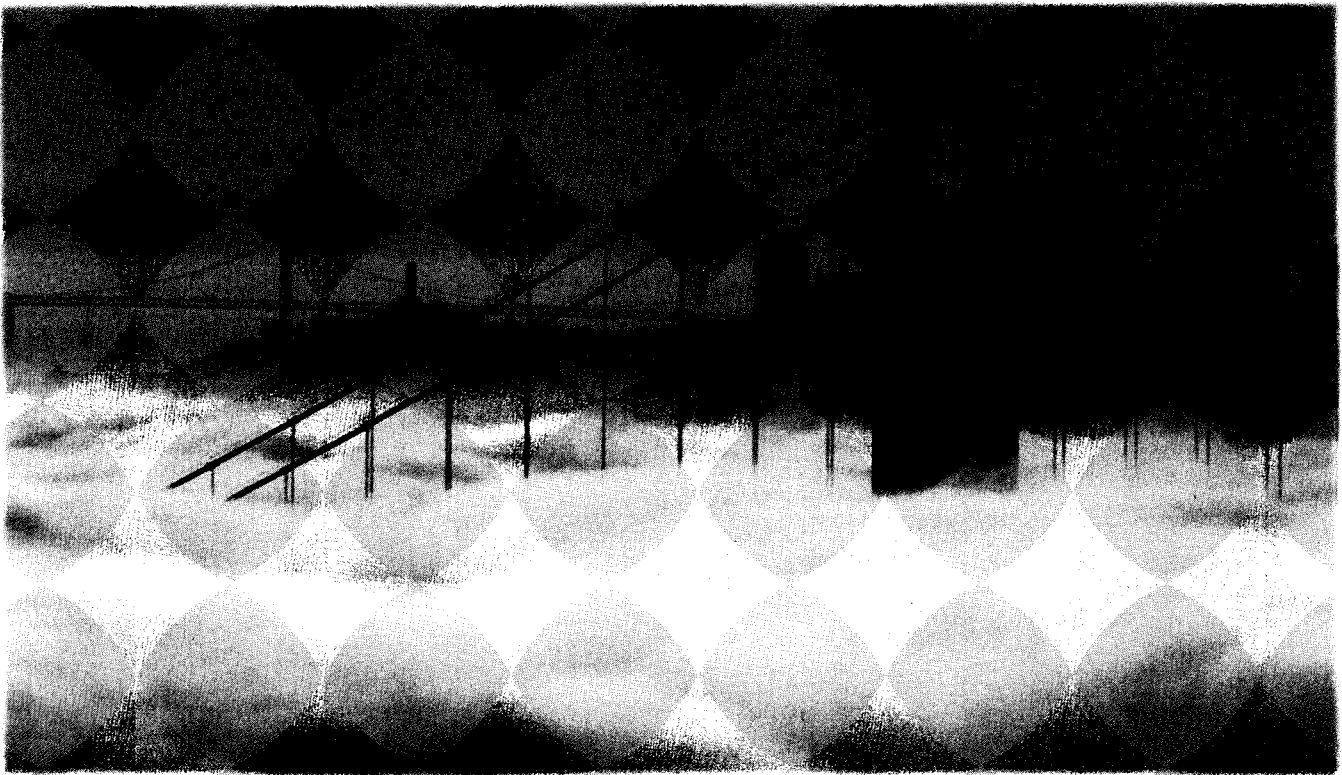
April 7, at 2:00 A.M., Daylight Saving Time begins; clocks in most localities should be set ahead one hour. 14, New Moon. 22–23, Earth encounters some celestial debris that has been around for at least 2,500 years: the Lyrid meteors. They can best be seen in the hours after 2:00 A.M., when the first-quarter moon has set. 28, Full Moon, also known this month as the Grass, Egg, or Planter’s Moon.

75 YEARS AGO

William Jewett Tucker, writing in the April, 1916, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: “The current of feeling which sets so strongly away from war does not run with equal force toward peace. It seems to be increasingly difficult to organize the anti-war sentiment into the peace movement. The reason commonly given is the confirmed unbelief of men in the practicability of universal peace. I question the sufficiency of the explanation. When men are stirred by tremendous convictions they are not daunted by the fear of impracticability. I believe that we are as clearly justified in committing the cause of universal peace to ‘the opinion of mankind’ as were our forefathers in committing their new doctrine of universal liberty and equality to the same accessible and sufficient authority. True, we thereby ask for nothing less than a reversal of the habit of thought of the world. They in their time asked for nothing less.”



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REPORTS & COMMENT

NOTES

Exchange

Pennies for thoughts

WHEN WILLIAM JAMES comes to mind unbidden, what I think of most often is a time in New York City, during the penny shortage of 1981, when the McDonald's on Seventieth and Second was offering—so a huge sign said in the window—a free Big Mac to every customer who exchanged five dollars' worth of pennies for a five-dollar bill. I pulled the blankets off my bed and on the smoothness of the bottom sheet counted out five one-hundred-penny piles from the copper reserves I had accumulated in barely a year and had stored in a number of glass custard cups and other amphorae in my room. The pennies so grouped I scooped into five plastic bags, and with, in hand, my pounds of spare change and an anthology of William James's writing which I had taken out of the library that very day, I walked to the McDonald's and waited my turn. But as I slowly drew closer to the cash registers, my elation and amusement at taking McDonald's up on its offer (and thereby getting a rate of return on my residual earnings, roughly

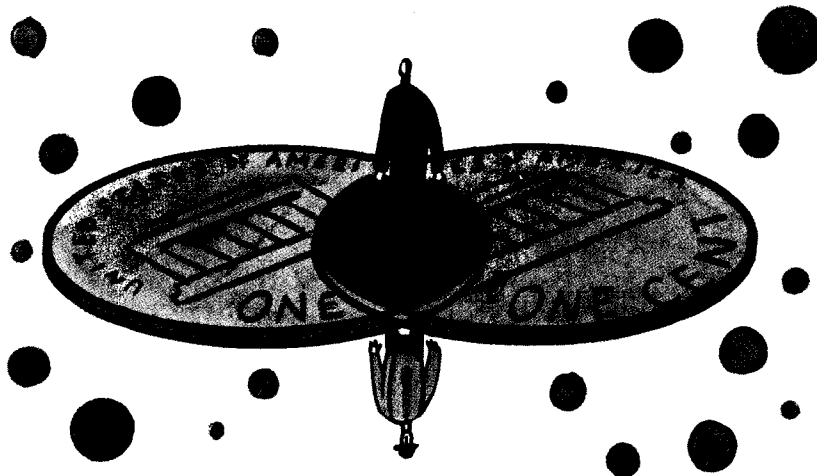
\$1.50 on \$5.00 over a year's time, that would have made any mutual fund proud) began to sift away: I was right in the middle of the dinner rush, and there were many rich-looking, cashmere-coated women behind me in line whose tempers would snap if my pennies added a further delay.

As I feared, when my turn came the manager was called over, and despite my repeated claims that he didn't have to count the pennies, that there really *were* five hundred of them there, he poured out each plastic bag in turn and slid its contents two by two off the counter and into his palm, while beads of sweat appeared on his brow, and the cooking machines beeped their blood-pressure-heightening appeals behind him, and cash drawers sprang open and were pelvised closed, and rushed order-takers skated around on several mashed french fries underfoot—for this guy was only the manager on duty: he had only inherited the free Mac offer, he hadn't conceived it; he had at most taped up the sign, and he evidently didn't comprehend its motive, which was the overridingly urgent

need for pennies, in bulk, their precise numbers to be determined at the close of business in the leisure of the back office, and not while dozens of well-off, exhausted East Siders curled their lips at my somehow pathetic miserliness, and especially at the sight of my humiliatingly domestic plastic sandwich bags, which looked so out of place, so homemade, slumped anonymously on a counter where every carton and wrapper and cup had a ratifying logo printed on it, as if my bags enclosed stale *trouvailles* I'd discovered poking through the trash after a church bake sale, or ancient, concave bologna sandwiches that my mother had made for me to take to grade school and that I had hoarded all these years in jabbering archivalism—as if, in other words, I was, in my indigent desperation, trying to pawn some unlovely private collection, of value only to me, in exchange for food.

When the pennies were finally all counted and I got the free Big Mac and a paid-for drink to go with it, I was fuchsia not only with primary embarrassment but also with the secondary,

more agonizing humiliation of not having been able to pull off this unchallenging public moment without blushing. I reeled to the violently yellow "dining room," and to escape any stares at my facial coloring I bent very low over the William James book, which I opened randomly at a selection from *The Principles of Psychology*.



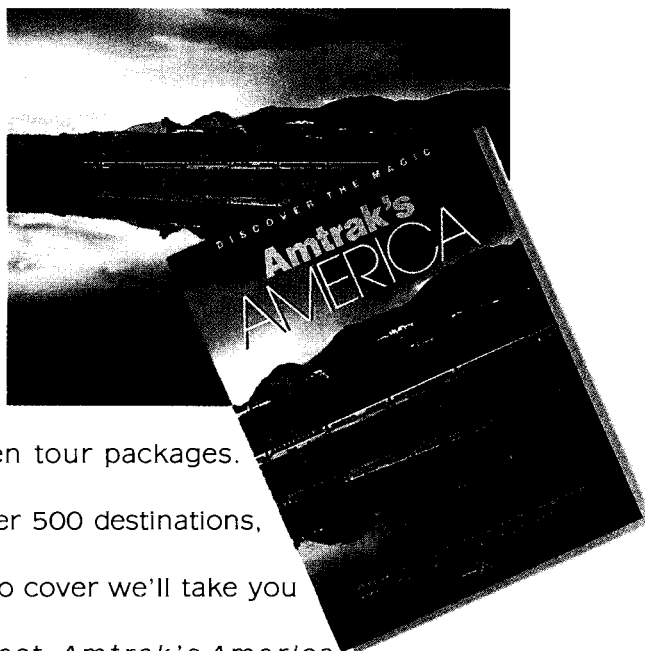
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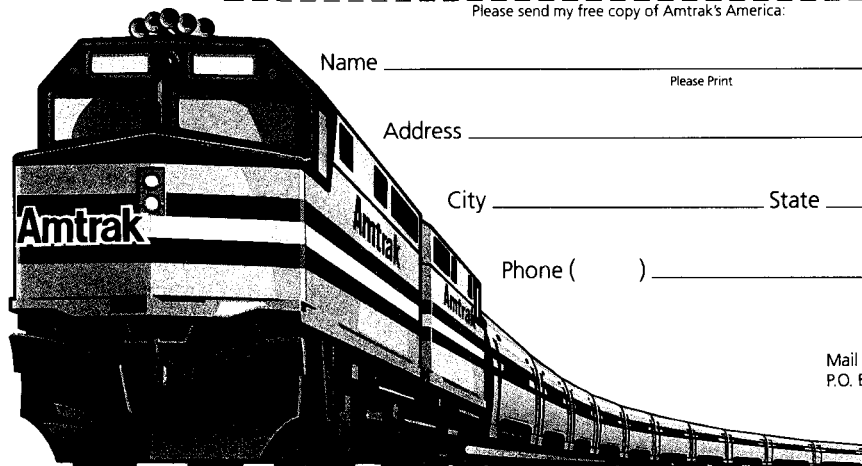
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BUT THE MOMENT I began eating, my mortification reversed its engines and transformed itself into a fierce desire to gloat: I was chewing my way through something substantial, tiered, sweet, meaty, that had cost everyone else in the room money but that I had gotten free. I had a five-dollar bill in my wallet that I hadn't had before: McDonald's was *paying me* to eat here! I wanted to laugh a wicked mean pitiless insane laugh, the kind that some bums, who for some reason have always found the sight of me funny, would often helplessly produce, shaking their heads, pointing a finger, as my too-tall, wire-rimmed, pinheaded form caught their dissolutely untetra-hydrozelinable eye: among bums I felt like an established and salaried Upper East Sider, but among Upper East Siders I felt I had hugely swollen ankles and tattered back issues of magazines projecting from several pockets and dirty bandages hanging by one wing on my face.

And contributing at least half of this joyful inburst was William James himself, who, it turned out, was *really good*: unpretentious, jolly, at his ease—as smart as, but completely different from, his brother. I came to a page with an illustration—a number of shaky curved lines all traveling by different routes from a point A to a point Z—meant to illustrate the various paths that the recently christened, pre-Joycean “stream of thought” might take in moving from one established idea to another. It was a glorious sight. The confident, lighthearted didacticism of this small drawing made me shake my head with instant affection for William James; I thought of him frowning over it, attempting to capture by the tremble in his execution the irregular uniqueness of each thought-path, prouder of this artwork perhaps than of the prose that led up to it, because his first wish had been to be a painter, and I thought of those several contemporary illustrators whose style was based on the same trembly, Dow-Jonesy contour line: William Steig, for instance, and Seymour Chwast, and whoever did that Alka-Seltzer cartoon commercial in the sixties in which (as I remembered it) a Yiddishly unhappy human stomach, gesticulating from an analyst's couch or chair, its esophagus wagging like an unruly forelock, told its troubles to a nodding murmuring

doctor. Now when William James enters my thoughts unexpectedly, the accompanying image most often takes this form, as the drawing on that right-hand page on that evening at McDonald's.

And yet the major coincidence of the occasion—the actual exchange of pennies for thoughts, the sudden, specially sauced incarnation on Seventieth Street of that formerly empty saying—did not make itself felt to me until last year, as I worked on a novel in which small change figured, against my will,

as a minor theme, and I finally recognized, with disappointment conjoined with gratitude, that this Jamesian memory explained to some degree *why* pennies and their brethren seemed so strangely evocative to me and worth writing about: Disappointment, of course, because one always wants one's fascinations to come originally from life and not from the library. Gratitude, as well, because another of those shaky curved lines had made it from A to Z.

—Nicholson Baker

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An advertisement from the Hong Kong magazine *The Emigrant*

HONG KONG

A Culture of Emigration

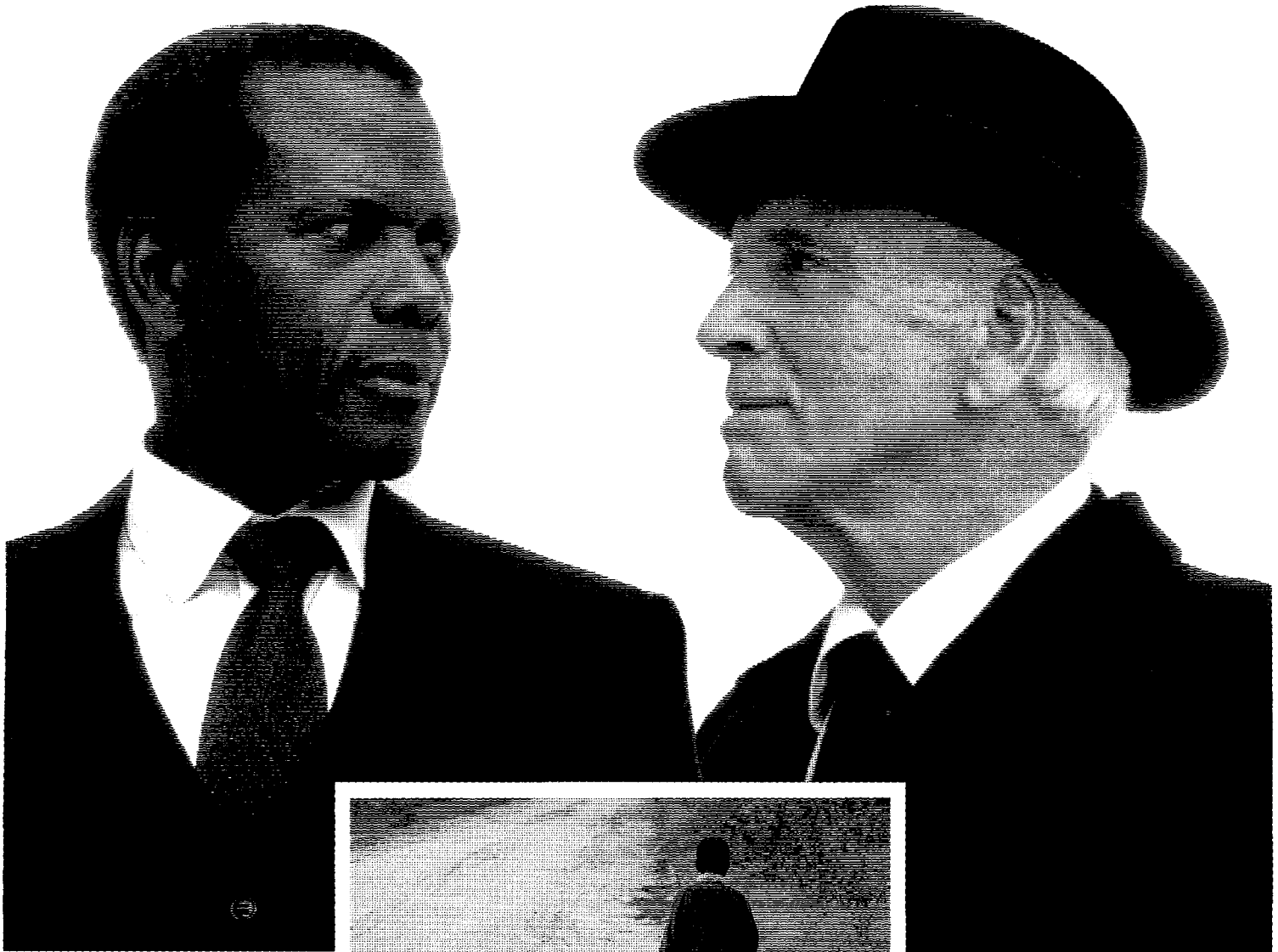
*Destination: Canada,
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SET BETWEEN A luxury shopping center and the Hilton Hotel, the Bank of China stabs the sky, rising seventy stories above the mess of traffic on Queensway in central Hong Kong. Two long poles jut out from the bank's triangulate peak. To Hong Kong Chinese familiar with the traditional geomancy of *feng shui*, the poles are symbolic—like knives probing for the heart of the city. The building, Hong Kong's tallest skyscraper, is im-

pressive but unloved, both for its harsh lines and for what it represents: China's impending rule. As most of the world has long been aware, on July 1, 1997, Hong Kong will revert from being a British colony to being a piece of China. And as most people are aware, China is having a difficult time persuading Hong Kong residents to stay. Denied any real form of self-government, and not trusting the People's Republic to maintain Hong Kong's “capitalist system and lifestyle . . . for 50 years,” as promised in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, Hong Kong Chinese are voting with their feet. “For people my age, this should be the best time for us,” says a twenty-eight-year-old career woman who is emigrating to Canada. “But emigration has become a fashion. Because everyone else is going, it becomes your destiny.”

The numbers tell part of the story of the brain drain. In the early 1980s, according to Donald Tsang, the Hong

Separate But Equal



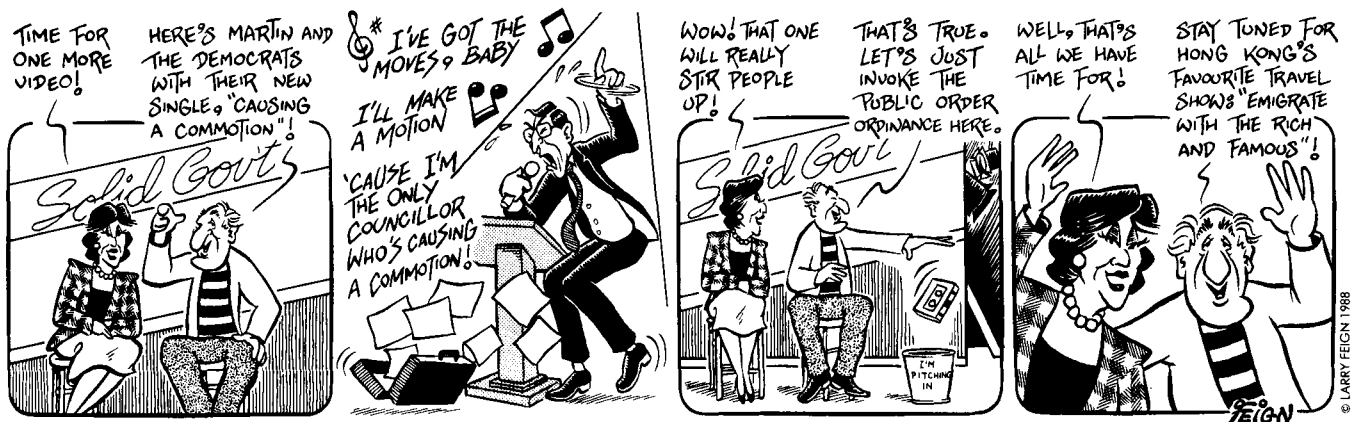
One had already run for President. One would someday sit on the Supreme Court. They fought in the highest court in the land, pitted against one another over the education of a single black schoolboy. And the result is still being felt today.

**Sunday and Monday
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The subject of emigration is brought up frequently in Larry Feign's popular Hong Kong comic strip Lily Wong

Kong government's point man on the emigration issue, about 20,000 people a year left the territory; in 1987 the number rose to 30,000, and in 1988 and 1989 to more than 40,000. The estimate for 1990 is that 62,000 people emigrated. For the rest of the decade the numbers will probably be even higher, swelled by people who decided after the Beijing massacre, in June of 1989, that Deng Xiaoping's word was not assurance enough to bet their lives on.

In gross terms, the problem is bad enough: 62,000 people is more than one percent of Hong Kong's population. But it is the kind of people who are leaving that has made emigration a critical issue.

Surveys taken by professional associations fill in the picture: 63 percent of government doctors, 98 percent of pharmacists, 85 percent of surveyors, 79.8 percent of accountants, and 50 percent of veterinarians have said they are planning to leave Hong Kong before 1997. About half of all personnel managers, engineers, and bankers say they will "definitely" or "probably" emigrate, according to a 1989 poll published by the Hong Kong Institute of Personnel Management. A less scientific source, the flamboyant singer and actress Anita Mui, says that 80 percent of Hong Kong's entertainment elite is set to go. One of Hong Kong's biggest pop-culture extravaganzas ever was the singer Leslie Cheung's extended farewell, which consisted of thirty-three concerts. Cheung is planning to settle in Canada, the most popular destination among Hong Kong émigrés because it is the desirable country easiest to get into.

Although not everyone who says he will leave will do so, the idea of emi-

gration is pervasive. There have been two Chinese-language comedies on television—*Priceless Adventure* and *Uncle Bill and Aunt Lydia*—that draw on emigration for a theme. In my middle-class neighborhood Chu's Photo Shop displays a poster demonstrating that it can take pictures of the exact style and quality required for Canadian and U.S. visas. At a newsstand nearby I can buy the *Hong Kong Standard*, which regularly publishes a separate section on Canada. If I buy the *South China Morning Post* instead, I may come across an ad for fur-lined raincoats, clearly aimed at the Canada-bound. Or I can buy *The Emigrant*, a glossy Chinese-English magazine, circulation 25,000, which offers tips and background information for would-be emigrants. The pages are filled with display ads from moving companies, a pet transport service, and

emigration consultants, who seek out business opportunities and help with the paperwork. A short walk beyond the newsstand, a real-estate office advertises mock-Tudor houses in Britain and a tour agency books flights on Canadian Airlines International, which offers more than twice as many flights to Canada as it did five years ago. At the airport one can buy books like *Successful Migrating to Australia* and *New Zealand—An Ideal Destination for Migrants*, and even picture books of Belize, which, until it stopped the program in late 1989, had sold citizenship to several hundred worried Hong Kong residents for a bargain price of \$23,800.

Emigration, or the hope of emigration, has changed the way people in Hong Kong live. Take Charlotte Lee, an advertising account executive who graduated from the prestigious Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 1986. Last March, Lee survived a traditional Chinese wedding, complete with five changes of clothes ("I felt like a singer backstage," she says), two banquets, and an homage to her in-laws. The only thing missing was a marriage certificate. In the eyes of their families, friends, and each other, Mr. and Mrs. Lee are married. But they never registered the event; legally they are still single. The failure to register was no oversight. "You see," Mrs. Lee explains, "my husband's sister is already in Canada. She can apply for her parents to emigrate. Then they can apply for their single children. If you're married, you must apply on your own, and it's much more difficult." Eventually her husband will emigrate; she will join him and they will marry again, this time legally, in Canada. Lee says she will not

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have children until she is safely settled abroad.

Children can be passports in and of themselves; it is common for pregnant Hong Kong women to go overseas to give birth. "An American passport even at \$12,000"—estimated to be the average cost of travel, lost time, and medical care—"is a bargain for three reasons," Julia Leung wrote in *The Asian Wall Street Journal*. "The least of these is a guarantee of subsidized U.S. tuition fees. More important, the passport stubs out the 1997 problem for the second generation at the outset. Last, the parents will benefit from the option of immigration when their American kids become old enough to apply for citizenship for them. Meanwhile, their parents continue gold-mining in Hong Kong."

The effect of emigration on families is not always benign. Many people want the security of a foreign passport but also want to keep their careers on track in Hong Kong. The result is the emergence of *tai hung yan*, or "astronauts," who settle their families abroad but continue to work in Hong Kong, flying back and forth as often as possible. Both Canada and the United States discourage the practice, but it is common enough that one area in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is popular with Hong Kong Chinese, has become known as Widow Street. Social workers in Hong Kong have reported cases in which handicapped children and elderly parents were left behind when their families emigrated. The desire to emigrate colors the choices that teenagers make. Steve Freeman, Hong Kong's director of the American Field Service, a high school student-exchange program, says that Canada is considering

dropping Hong Kong students from the program because so many are attempting to use the exchange as a springboard into Canadian universities, and eventually citizenship.

But the most difficult life choices are

being made by mid-career professionals. Lillian Chau has worked her way up the ladder to become a vice-president of the international company where she has been employed since graduating from Hong Kong Baptist College in 1979. She is married to a personnel manager, and they have a six-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter. They live in a new apartment in a good neighborhood, dress stylishly, travel regularly—the very prototypes of chic Hong Kong yuppies with the world at their feet. Three years ago two of Chau's subordinates walked into her office to tell her they were emigrating. "I had never heard they were thinking of it before," she recalls, "and these were friends. They said I should think about it." She did, and despite the initial reluctance of her husband, they applied to Canada and were accepted. They leave for Toronto this year. "I have read about what happened to people doing well before the Communists took over in China," she says. "So many went back after Mao, but the government failed

them. I've heard the horror stories—I won't take the risk."

ONE EFFECT OF the constant outflow of people is to open spots that others can fill. Job-hopping is on the rise, not only so people can take advantage of faster promotion but also because they are trying to put together a nest egg for their new life abroad.

Many of Hong Kong's multinational

corporations have quietly begun efforts to secure passports for their people. Swiss, Italian, Belgian, French, and German firms have pressed their governments to grant residency to key Hong Kong employees. Cathay Pacific Airways and the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club are setting up computer operations in Australia in an effort to retain emigrating employees. U.S. business interests in Hong Kong lobbied hard in favor of the recent immigration overhaul passed by Congress. Under the new legislation the number of Hong Kong immigrants will be allowed to quadruple—from 5,000 a year to more than 20,000—for at least the next six years. One small electronics-assembly company, Carley of California (HK), has given its top manager a lump sum to qualify her for Canada's business-migration package. The hope is that she will come back, or at least delay her departure. If not, says the company president, James Carley, "I owe her that much, because she's been a fantastic employee for twenty years. A lot of businesses are doing this kind of thing, often surreptitiously."

Seeing an opportunity for a quick influx of skilled immigrants, a number of countries have put out the welcome mat. The Singapore consulate was mobbed, in July of 1989, when it announced a plan to admit 25,000 families. Tonga, Tahiti, the Marshall Islands, Trinidad, South Africa, and Bangladesh have announced plans to trade residency rights for investment or cash.

These devices are all aboveboard, but, inevitably, illegal scams have also surfaced. Manuel Noriega's nephew, Ciro Noriega Quintero, when he was consul in Hong Kong, allegedly sold Panamanian passports for \$10,000 to \$15,000 apiece. Reportedly, about 3,000 Hong Kong people took him up on the offer, settled in Panama, and are now awaiting word on whether they will be allowed to stay. In a more elegant scheme, the Federal Republic of Corterra offered passports to its idyllic, democratic nest of islands in the South Pacific for just \$16,000. Don't look for Corterra on the map: it does not exist—a rude surprise for the handful of people who put down a deposit. Hong Kong's relentless passport quest has made the territory a butt of jokes abroad. Some Canadians refer to their new compatriots as "yacht people."

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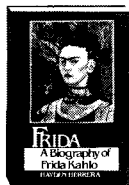
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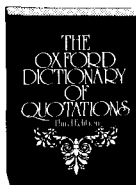
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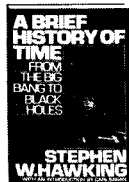
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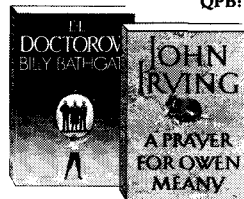
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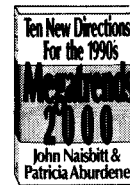
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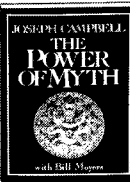
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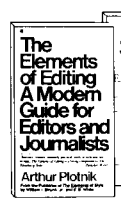
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After denying that the brain drain was a problem, and propelled by the panic of Hong Kong Chinese after the Beijing massacre, last year the British government passed legislation to give 50,000 real British passports to key personnel. Although 3.25 million Hong Kong people are British nationals, they are technically known as British Dependent Territory Citizens; they have not had the automatic right to live or work in Britain since 1962. The nationality package is designed to restore that right to the lucky 50,000 (plus their families), the thinking being that if these important people know they have a way out after 1997, they will choose to stay. Hong Kong people ask why, if Britain accepts that argument, it does not grant passports to all the territory's inhabitants. Almost no one outside the bureaucracy thinks the nationality package can work. For one thing, 50,000 is too small a number to protect the critical core of Hong Kong. The plan envisages, for example, spreading 2,558 passports among the 44,640 or so members of the medical community and 3,334 among the approximately 57,300 engineers, architects, and surveyors. "The nationality package is not going to solve the problem," says Chris Pomeroy, a British journalist. "It's like saying to twenty people in a room, 'We'll secure a future for three of you, so the rest of you should feel confident.'" China considers the plan an infringement of its sovereignty and has threatened not to honor the new passports. But Beijing has done nothing to stanch the flow of emigrants from Hong Kong, no doubt preferring to have such possible troublemakers out of the way.

AT A CANDLELIGHT vigil last June 100,000 people gathered in Victoria Park to commemorate the victims of the Beijing spring. Through silence, speeches, and song they mourned their compatriots and, in a sense, their own fate. But the speeches hardly mentioned Hong Kong: the plea was for democracy and justice in China.

Thus has the hard truth come home to the people of Hong Kong that their future cannot be guaranteed by joint declarations, nationality packages, Tongan passports, or even money. Almost no one believes that under Chinese rule Hong Kong will remain, in

the words that have become a mantra for Beijing and London, "stable and prosperous." Even if that is what China wants, does today's People's Republic have any idea how to achieve it? To ask the question is to answer it. Hong Kong's hopes lie entirely in the emergence of a more decent and humane government in China.

—Cait Murphy



The ferry signal at the Dorena landing

TIPTONVILLE

Across the Mississippi

In search of ferries past

WHEN I WAS twenty years old, I drove from Kansas City to Chicago to visit a girl I knew. I had been reading a lot of first-person novels that year, and I had developed a romantic point of view.

Well, things don't always turn out in life the way they do in books, and a very short time later I found myself driving back to Kansas City. I was in a bad mood and in no hurry to get home. My route meandered through Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, the bootheel of Missouri, northern Arkan-

sas, and another part of Missouri. The trip covered 1,500 miles and lasted four days. I ate in diners that served fried fish, french fries, and fritters in the same meal. I slept in motels where the rooms cost practically nothing and the soap was a normal-sized bar of Lifebuoy that somebody had already used.

Some of those highways I drove on were as smooth and black as electrical tape. They wound around hills and between farms and through towns where there seemed to be nothing for sale except liquor and gasoline. I had a two-seater convertible in those days, and I took off the top and let the wind blow through my hair as I—Hey, wait, that *is* the way things turn out in books! The compact farmhouses seemed haunting and familiar, like places I had visited in dreams. The air flowing rapidly over the open passenger compartment created a zone of low pressure that gradually slurped up my sorrows and left me feeling light-headed and emotionally unencumbered.

Toward the end of the second day of my trip I found myself traveling west on a small highway in northwestern Tennessee. On my map the line representing the highway came to an end at the eastern edge of the broad blue stripe representing the Mississippi River. Directly across the stripe, on the Missouri side, the line began again, with a different number. On the map there was no indication of a bridge.

The sun was going down. The highway turned into the main street of a small town called Tiptonville. I saw the people closing their stores and heading home to their families. Then the town petered out. The street became a road. I drove past some run-down houses and through a soybean field and up onto the levee.

There at the edge of the river I saw how the two lines on my map were connected. Moored at the bank was a small towboat with a small barge attached to its side: a ferry. A man who had been smoking a cigarette on the bank walked slowly down to the edge of the river. I drove behind him and eased onto the bumpy deck of the barge; then I got out and stood beside my car. There was another man in the boat's tiny pilothouse. We pulled into the river. There were no other passengers.

At Tiptonville the Mississippi River is more than a mile wide. I could see a lot of trees on the opposite bank but no

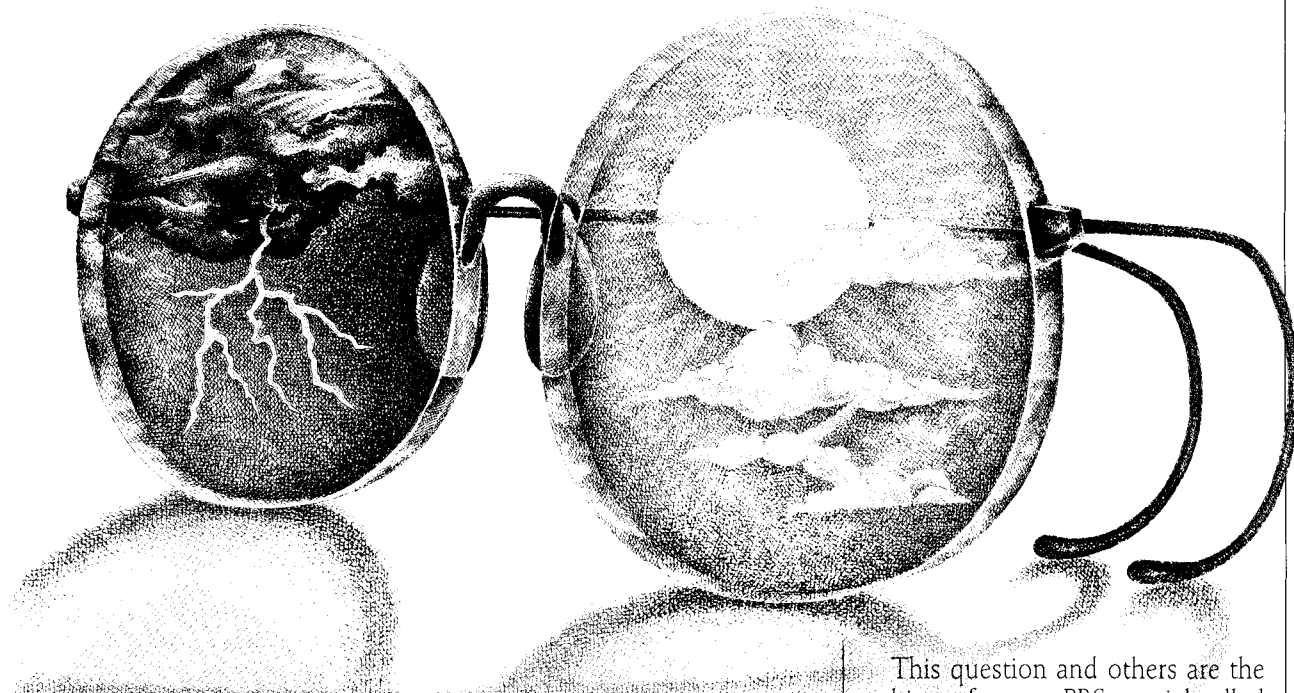
OUR PERCEPTIONS of risk affect where we live, where we work, even what we eat and drink. But how do we really know what is risky?

One way to judge risk is with probabilities. For example, the odds you'll be struck by lightning in the next hour are one in 600,000.

But most of us judge risk in a slightly less scientific manner. We see a news report about a fatal plane crash. So we worry about our next flight. Yet, in 1989, out of 7,625,000 commercial

OUR PERCEPTIONS OF RISK DON'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH THE REALITIES.

DO WE REALLY KNOW RISK WHEN WE SEE IT?



We are living longer and healthier lives than ever before. Yet, from airplane accidents to reports of "poisonous" apples, it seems we face new dangers every day. Are we the safest people ever, or are we the most at risk?

flights in the U.S., there were only 11 fatal crashes killing 278 people. Meanwhile, almost 50,000 people died from a form of travel few of us fear, the car.

Why? One theory is that we feel safer when we're in control. In a plane we are mere passengers. But in a car we're behind the wheel. We tend to forget the uncontrollable elements

that make driving so dangerous — other drivers may be inexperienced, tired or even drunk.

Perceptions of risk like this affect the decisions we make not just as individuals but also as a society. From earthquakes to pesticides on our foods, do the things we worry about really pose a bigger risk to our safety than the things we don't worry about?

This question and others are the subject of a new PBS special called "Living Against the Odds." A program hosted by Richard Lewis, and produced by the WGBH Science Unit in association with the World Wildlife Fund, and brought to you by the people of Chevron.

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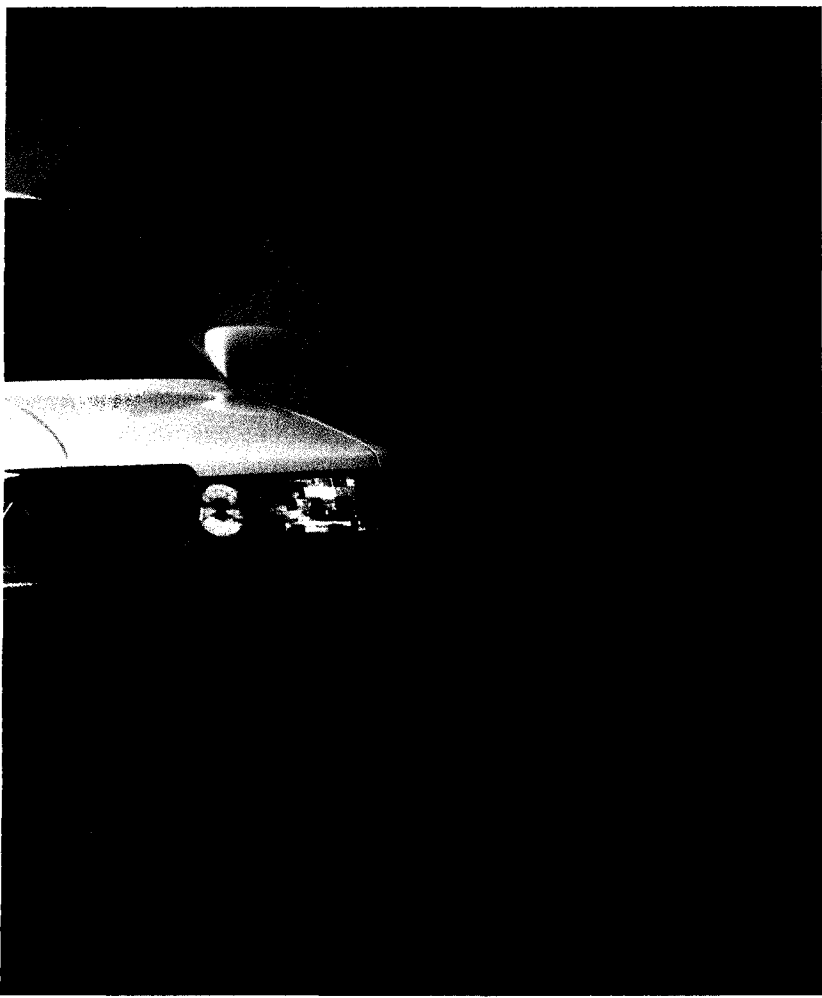


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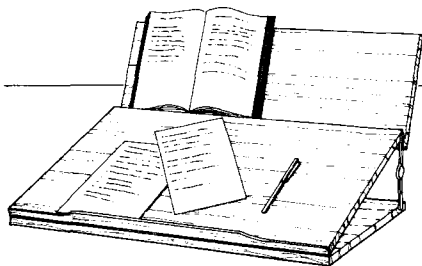
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houses or farms. The sun was red and huge and directly in front of us. It seemed to be dropping into the water, where its reflection spread out like a path of fire. I reached into my car and pulled out a bottle that I had bought earlier at the House of Bourbon.

By the time we reached Missouri, the sun had set and a heavy darkness was consuming the trees on both banks. All of a sudden I felt that I was about to begin a mysterious new chapter of my life, and that the great roiling Mississippi River was a spiritual frontier I had been destined to cross in what I now realized was not just a lazy car trip but an uneasy metaphorical journey into manhood, or something. Also, by this point I was mildly inebriated. The barge thudded into the bank. I paid the deckhand, got back into my car, and drove off into the night.

AMERICA USED to have thousands of small ferries, the kind that stick in my imagination. Any river that was too deep to ford and too wide to bridge needed a ferry to connect the people who lived on either side. Ferries carried crops and animals to market. They carried people to and from farms and towns. At the historical museum in the Connecticut town where I now live, there's an old picture of a cow being hauled across a local river on a ferry the size of a station wagon. Like many early ferries, it was powered by horses pulling ropes. Some others were powered simply by the current, which nudged them along a stationary guideline, or by people pushing poles against the river's bottom.

The advent of the automobile initially made small ferries more important rather than less. Cars got stuck in fords that horses and wagons handled with ease. But then cars became more numerous, and highways got better, and bridge-building technology improved. Except in the relatively few places where bridges were not an alternative, or where existing ferries had developed a strong sentimental following, small ferries began to disappear.

Many states still have at least a few small ferries. You can find a lot of them on the maps in the *Rand McNally Road Atlas*, where they are usually identified by the abbreviation "FY." The best places to look are on wide rivers and skinny lakes. My state has two. One operates on the Connecticut River be-

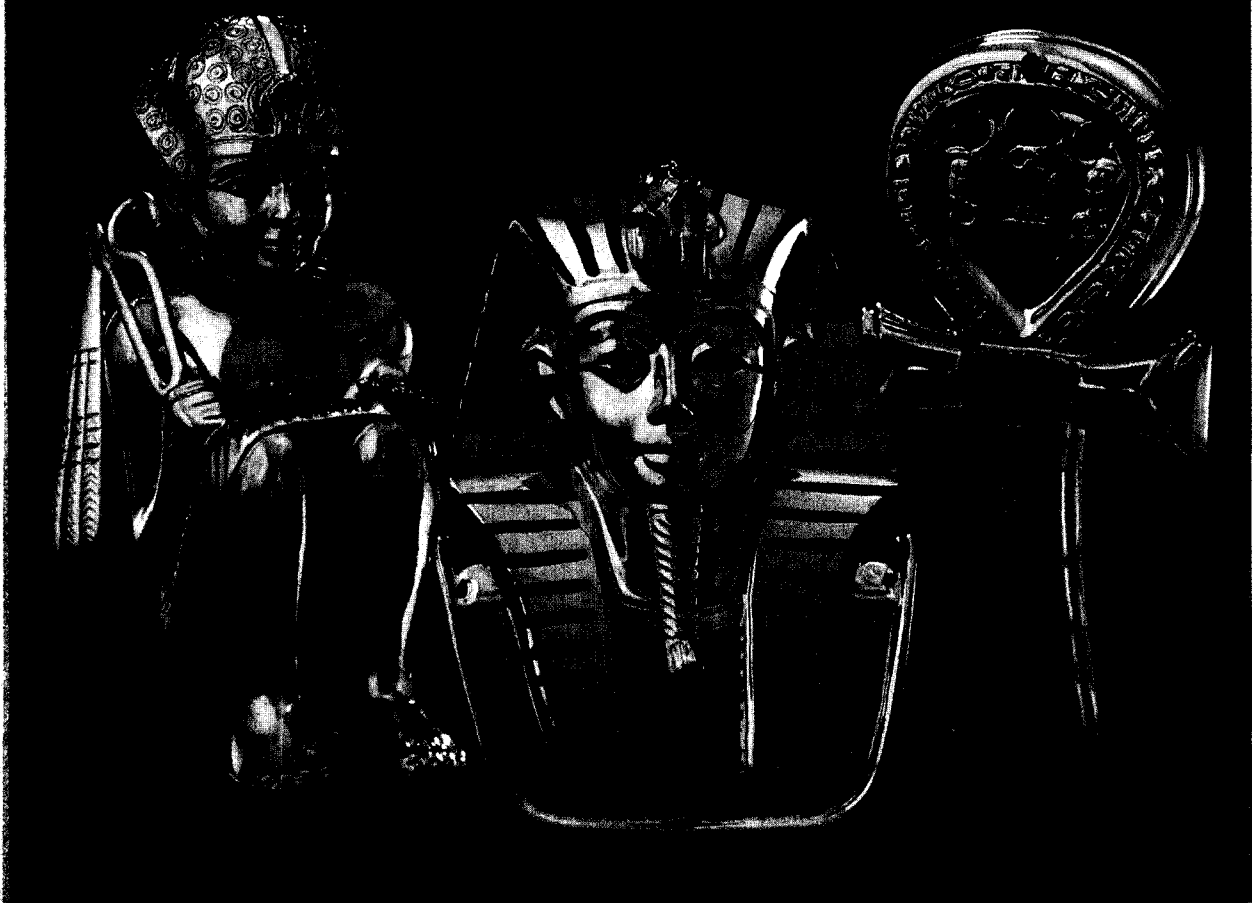
tween the towns of Chester and Hadlyme. It can carry eight cars. There is a children's book about this ferry, called *Ferryboat*, by Betsy and Giulio Maestro. The other, which for some reason isn't on the map, carries three cars at a time between Rocky Hill and Glastonbury, about twenty-five miles up the river from Chester. This ferry, whose predecessor made its first crossing in 1655, is said to be the oldest continuously operated ferry in the United States. According to Sarah Bird Wright's *Ferries of America*, a wonderful paperback guide that lists 270 ferries of all sizes in thirty-nine states, the Rocky Hill ferry was at one time powered by a horse that walked a treadmill in the middle of the boat.

I've ridden on a few small ferries over the years. I took a six-car ferry across Bull Shoals Lake, in northern Arkansas, during that same aimless car trip fifteen years ago. On several occasions I have ridden on the three-car ferry that operates between Edgartown, on Martha's Vineyard, in Massachusetts, and Chappaquiddick Island. Shortly before my wife and I got married, we took a twelve-car ferry across the Illinois River and then a sixteen-car ferry across the Mississippi River twenty or thirty miles above St. Louis. The sixteen-car ferry (which is based in Golden Eagle, Illinois, and is the only paddlewheel ferry still operating on the Mississippi) was very nice. Still, it was a bit big for my taste.

There are several small ferries that I would like to ride on someday. There is a three-car ferry that crosses the Rio Grande between Los Ebanos, Texas, and Ciudad Diaz Ordaz, Mexico. It is powered by the arm muscles of Mexican laborers, who pull it along a cable stretched across the frontier. There is a four-car ferry at Buena Vista, Oregon, that used to be piloted across the Willamette River by twin brothers named Willie and Willard. There is a three-car ferry that, in addition to hauling passengers, carries the mail between Cheboygan, Michigan, and Bois Blanc Island, in Lake Huron.

Of course, there are also plenty of big ferries, such as the ones that carry people and cars between Cape Cod and Nantucket, or between Seattle and Alaska, or across Lake Michigan. My state has several big ferries, all of which operate on or near Long Island Sound and two of which can carry as

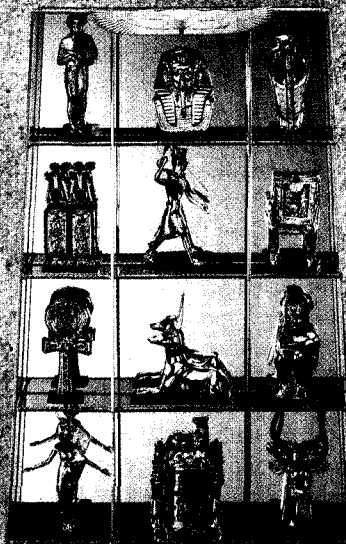
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The Dorena-Hickman ferry, Kentucky bound, sets out across the Mississippi

many as a hundred cars and a thousand passengers. I like these ferries, and I happily ride on them when I get the chance. But there is something about a small ferry that—for me, anyway—conjures up images not only of old-fashioned American colorfulness but also of dark yearning and Charon-related going-to-hellness.

For fifteen years after my crossing at Tiptonville, I thought frequently about that momentous evening on the Mississippi River, and I longed to take another ride on that ferry. But I didn't do anything about my longing. Then, a few months ago, on a day that did not seem radically different from any other, I suddenly called the Missouri highway department and asked whether anyone there knew anything about the ferry I had taken. The man I talked to said that there had once been several ferries in that area, but as far as he knew, they were all gone. To make sure, he went to check a map. When he came back, he said that there did appear to be one ferry left down there, but it wasn't at Tiptonville. It ran between Dorena, Missouri, and Hickman, Kentucky, just north of the Tennessee line. A few weeks later I flew to St. Louis and rented a car.

THERE IS A pretty big difference between the kind of metaphor-laden journey of discovery one takes at twenty and the kind one takes at thirty-five. For example, when one is thirty-five, the car one drives may not be a convertible and it may have a

telephone activated by one's Visa Gold card. Also, at thirty-five one may have a complicated child-care arrangement with one's wife whereby each spouse has to pay back the other for time spent away from home. I couldn't just set out in any old direction, as I might have fifteen years before, and figure that I would eventually end up in Hickman. Instead, I had to take the interstate down to Sikeston, Missouri, about 140 miles south of St. Louis, and spend the night in a pretty nice motel.

Early the next morning I drove to Dorena. Sikeston is a good twenty miles west of the Mississippi, but I could tell right away that I was in river country. The fields were as flat as lakes, having been planed down by floods and by the shifting course of the big stream. People's yards were littered with fluffy white stuff that looked for all the world like—and, as it turned out, was—cotton (one of the crops growing in those flat fields).

I found the ferry landing before I saw much evidence of Dorena. It was a steep, sandy, open place. I could see the ferry in the river, making its way to Kentucky. Like the old Tiptonville ferry, it consisted of a small towboat with a small barge attached to it. It was painted red and white, and looked nice against the brownish-blue of the water. The Hickman landing was mostly hidden behind a long, narrow bar covered with short trees. Someone had cut a swath through the trees on the line of sight between the two landings. On my side was a sign that said TURN

BOARD FOR FERRY, so I turned it and sat on the hood of my car to wait. If I squinted, I could just make out a tiny black square on the Kentucky bank—the back of the other signal board.

When the ferry returned, I flipped the board back over and drove down the ramp onto the deck. By making a few phone calls the week before, I had learned that the owner of the Dorena-Hickman ferry is Hugh Lattus, a local farmer. I was hoping that Lattus would be on board, but he wasn't. The deckhand let me climb a ladder to the tiny pilothouse and use the radio to call Lattus's son, who was in his tractor harvesting corn somewhere in Hickman. The son said that his father would meet me at the landing after lunch.

I climbed down and we backed into the river. There was a metal arm on the bow of the towboat that was attached to another arm sticking out from the middle of one side of the barge. The stern of the boat was lashed to the barge with a big rope. When we had backed a little way into the river, the deckhand untied the big rope, permitting the boat to pivot slowly on the metal arm until it was facing Kentucky instead of Missouri. Then he used the big rope to retie the barge, and we continued on our way.

The Dorena-Hickman crossing is two miles and takes about fifteen minutes. I walked around on the barge, which can hold twelve cars, and looked at the river. The Mississippi seemed a bit low to me, but the deckhand said there was plenty of water. The channel, he said, was twenty-five feet deep. A huge mass of rusty grain barges, being pushed by a boat called the *John D. Geary*, churned in front of us. The *Geary*, out of Cincinnati, was carrying the autumn harvest to New Orleans. We plowed through its wake.

When we got to the other side, I drove around in Hickman, which has a population of about 3,000. The night before, the high school football team (called the Pilots) had been beaten by Fulton City, and some men at a gas station were grumbling about this. I saw an abandoned jailhouse, an old bank, and a store whose signs advertised GIFTS and LIVE BAIT. Mark Twain mentioned Hickman briefly in *Life on the Mississippi*, describing it as "pretty." (Hickman is just a few miles upriver from the area where the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords feud in *Huckle-*

berry Finn.) Nowadays the town looks a little tired. Its most striking feature is a massive concrete floodwall that blocks the downtown's view of the river and gives the tiny business district a claustrophobic feeling.

Hickman aspires to greater things. Its chamber of commerce has a new executive director, who hopes to attract new businesses, new residents, and more tourists. The ferry has a role to play in this revitalization, many residents believe. The *Hickman Courier* I read over lunch mentioned the ferry several times. In an article about efforts to increase ferry traffic a state transportation official was quoted as saying, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; and working together is success." In his regular front-page opinion column the newspaper's publisher chastised the makers of a new town map for putting the ferry in the wrong place. In the letters column a man named Bobby Ham wrote, "I feel that behind the blindfold the lady in the symbol of justice is weeping, for today the system has failed." (This had nothing to do with the ferry.)

When I returned to the landing, three cars (eighteen dollars!) were waiting for a ride to Missouri. A few minutes later Hugh Lattus pulled up in a pickup truck. He gave me a baseball cap with a picture of his ferry on it, and we stood between his truck and my car and talked. Lattus is a big man with graying hair and a farmer's hands. He was born in 1924. His voice is a deep, steady rumble that he turns into words by chipping off little ends here and there. As he approaches the end of a sentence, he takes smaller chips. I sometimes had trouble understanding him. But I got the general idea.

The Hickman ferry was founded in 1840, Lattus said, and it has operated continuously since. (The original barge was powered by horses pulling a rope.) The ferry came into the Lattus family in the late 1920s or early 1930s, when Lattus's uncle bought it. Business in those days was very good. Roads on the Missouri side were primitive, while roads on the Kentucky side were sound. To get their crops to market, Missouri farmers had first to transport them across the river. The only way to do that was by ferry.

When Lattus was about thirty, he began leasing the ferry from his uncle. Because controlling the ferry made it



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Why reforming our liability system America is to succeed

EXCESSIVE LIABILITY AWARDS MAKE IT TOUGH FOR U.S. COMPANIES TO COMPETE.

We are a compassionate society. We want to compensate those who have suffered.

But when our courts expand the traditional concepts of liability, causing defendants to pay excessive compensation, we add to the costs we all pay for goods and services. We encourage companies to stop research and development on new products. And we even make it harder for American companies to compete overseas.

PAYING A HIDDEN TAX.

In reality, the American system of liability has become the source of a hidden tax on our economy—a tax that can account for as much as 50% of the price paid for a product.

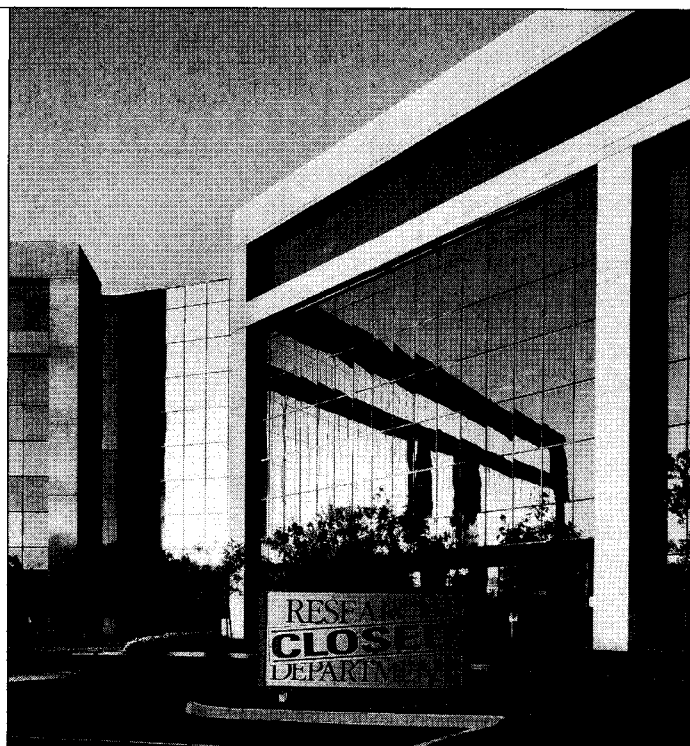
What's worse, it has been estimated that this hidden tax amounts to \$80 billion a year—a sum equal to the combined profits of the nation's 200 largest corporations.

Our economic competitors' legal systems do not encourage litigation to the extent we do. Consider, for example, that there are 30 times more lawsuits per capita in the U.S. than in Japan.

Is it any wonder that America is having a tough time competing in overseas markets?

UNCERTAINTY STIFLES ENTERPRISE.

The unpredictability of our liability system is also enormously costly to American competitiveness. For example, in a recent survey of CEOs, the Conference Board found that worry about potential liability lawsuits caused 47% of firms surveyed to discontinue one or more product lines. What's more, 25% stopped certain product research and development, and 39% decided



against coming out with a new product. Meanwhile, our overseas competitors continue to research and develop new products at an ever-increasing pace.

ARE WE CONTROLLING RISKS OR INCREASING THEM?

When we give a drunk driver the right to sue an automaker or highway engineer for a million dollars after a crash, are we controlling risk?

Or just encouraging risky and careless behavior?

If you are a manufacturer, you can be sued even if your product has state-of-the-art safety features. Even if your customer misused it against your instructions. Even if the risks of misuse were obvious.

When fear of lawsuits causes physicians to limit

ity system is essential if n overseas markets.

services to patients—or worse, to abandon their practice altogether—lack of adequate treatment means greater risks for everyone.

Is this controlling risk or increasing it?

It's an unhealthy and dangerous situation that needs correcting.

WE MUST REFORM OUR "DEEP POCKETS" APPROACH TO LIABILITY.

Specifically, we need to change our approach and base liability suits on fault.

Our current system often encourages the frivolous suing of those with the ability to pay—in other words, those with "deep pockets." But does it make sense to hold such parties entirely liable, even if they were only minimally at fault?

A MORE RATIONAL APPROACH.

Those who suffer economic losses because of another's negligence should be fairly reimbursed. No one could argue with this principle. There should also be just compensation for pain and suffering resulting from real and severe injuries.

But can we afford to continue a system that encourages litigation and financial judgments bearing little direct relationship to fault or to the actual cost of injuries suffered?

Clearly, a better approach is needed.

CONGRESS HAS A ROLE.

Legislation providing a uniform product liability standard would allow American companies to compete without the burdens of excessive liability risks. And this would unclog the courts and put American business in a stronger position as barriers to international trade and investment fall.

There is proposed legislation before Congress

dealing with these issues. A solution to the liability crisis is vital to American competitiveness, and Congress can play a role in restoring the right balance.

SO DO THE COURTS.

When all is said and done, our courts are the interpreters of our laws and our values. It's our values as a society that count, especially as reflected in the courts and individual jury decisions.

Together our legislative and judicial branches must recognize the damage being done to American competitiveness from the current liability system. And help America restore the proper balance.

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easy for him to move equipment back and forth, he began farming on both sides of the river. In 1962 he bought the ferry outright and named the towboat the *Barbara Don*, after his daughter and son. For a while he had plenty of business. Passenger traffic more than covered the cost of hauling his tractors and combines. Lattus had competitors—at Columbus, Kentucky; Tiptonville, Tennessee; Caruthersville, Missouri; and Heloise, Tennessee—but there was plenty of traffic for everyone.

Then, in the mid-1970s, two big bridges were built. One was near Dyersburg, Tennessee, about fifty miles to the south. The other was at Cairo, Illinois, about fifty miles to the north. The bridges provided easy links between the highways that had grown up on both sides of the river. The stream of ferry-bound cars and trucks became a trickle. One by one the competing ferries—including the one at Tiptonville—went out of business.

Lattus alone hung on. His ferry, which is roughly halfway between the bridges, still provided a useful shortcut to anyone who didn't feel like driving a hundred miles just to go to, say, New Madrid, Missouri, which lies twenty miles west as the crow flies. Still, the demand for rapid transit was low. If Lattus hadn't needed to move his own farming equipment, he probably would have quit too. Over the past eight or ten years, he estimates, the ferry's losses have ranged from \$10,000 to \$25,000 a year. Some days he doesn't haul any cars at all.

If his ferry is to survive, Lattus believes, it needs to develop more of a reputation as a tourist attraction. To this end he has been lobbying various officials in Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and Illinois. Just a week before my visit his efforts had led to the installation of a big blue WELCOME TO KENTUCKY sign near the Hickman landing. A dedication ceremony for the sign drew not only Lattus but also the mayor of Hickman, a county judge, various officials from the Kentucky departments of transportation and tourism, members of the Fulton County Tourism Committee, the new executive director of the Hickman Chamber of Commerce, and a photographer from the *Hickman Courier*, among others. After the ceremony, according to an account in the paper, "the group

boarded the ferry for a trip to the Missouri side where they viewed the 'Welcome to Missouri' sign." Lattus believes that the signs will eventually help to pull in new customers.

As Lattus and I talked, his ferry returned. There was no one waiting to ride on it. Lattus used to have a second barge, which held six cars, but he had to sell it. He told me that he wasn't sure how much longer he would be able to hang on. "My insurance just went up," he said. "Diesel's up. We can't charge more than six dollars, because if we do, people will just go around. If we don't get some assistance from the states, we're just going to have to tie it up."

SHOULD CONGRESS establish a superfund to ensure that the nation's small ferries don't all disappear? No. That would be kooky. Still, it's sad when small, interesting things disappear for good. To make myself feel a little sadder, I decided to drive down Highway 94 to Tiptonville to see if I could find the old landing.

One of the first things I saw when I turned onto the main street of Tiptonville was a sign that said FERRY CLOSED. I drove past it, turned left at the high school, and found the house of Wade Yates, who used to own the ferry. I had called Yates earlier in the day, and he had said I could visit him.

Yates was finishing an ice cream cone when I arrived. We went into his family room to talk. I learned that he was born in 1908; that his nickname is Foots, because his feet are so big; that one of his sons has been a maintenance man for Sears in Chicago for thirty-seven years; that his other son owns a big hardware store in Tiptonville and used to be the co-owner of the ferry; that Yates got his first job on the Mississippi River, as an oiler on a survey boat, when he was sixteen; that he worked on dredges operated by the Army Corps of Engineers for about nineteen years; that he took a job as a deckhand on the Tiptonville ferry in the early 1940s, in order to be able to spend more time at home; that he stood watching from the Tennessee bank one morning while a big boat ran into the ferry, sinking it and killing a deckhand; that he bought the ferry in the early 1960s for \$80,000.

During the first years that he owned the ferry, Yates said, he made a lot of

money. He had two barges (one of which held fifteen cars and the other of which held twelve) and three boats (one of which was a spare). He operated the ferry twenty-four hours a day, with two boats running during the daytime and one running at night. One evening in the early 1970s he drove over to his landing and found twenty-eight semi-trailers lined up on the road, waiting to go across. The fare for a truck in those days was five dollars. Over the years he carried enough of them to pay off all his loans, to build a new boat from scratch, and to buy a comfortable house for his family and a Cadillac for his wife.

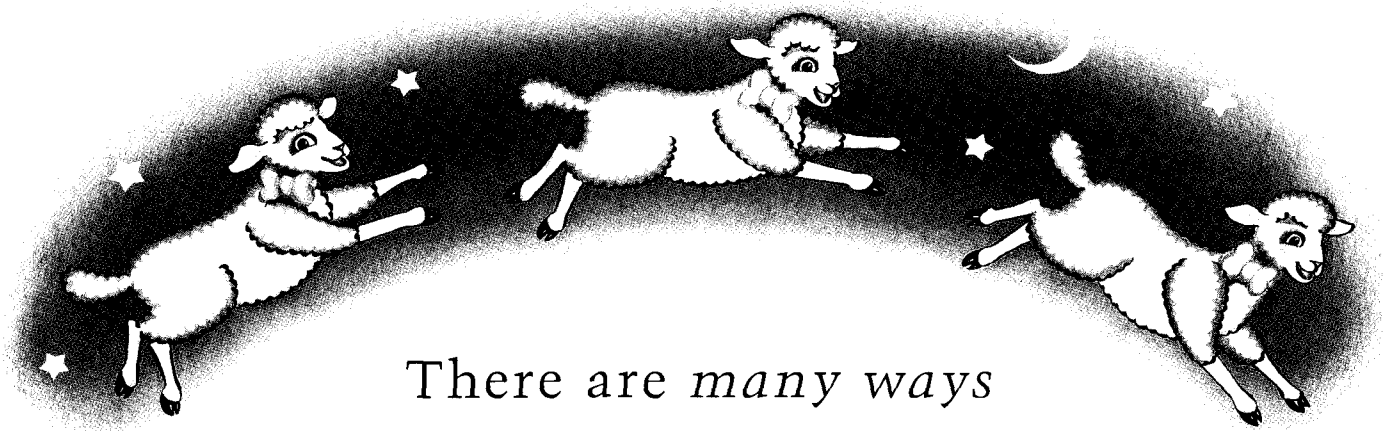
Then the bridge was built and the traffic disappeared. Shortly afterward Yates decided to pack it in. He sold one of his boats to a local grain elevator and one of his barges to the owner of a McDonald's restaurant in St. Louis. The restaurant is a reproduction steamboat that sits in the Mississippi River. Yates's old barge connects the steamboat to the bank. It's what you walk across when you go in to order a Big Mac. A few years later Yates sold his other barge and two other boats to a group of investors in Sistersville, West Virginia, who operate a ferry on the Ohio River between Sistersville and the fly-sized town of Fly, Ohio. Yates said that he would like to visit Sistersville someday but he probably never will, because he doesn't leave his house much anymore.

When we had finished talking, Yates gave me directions to the old landing. I drove back to the center of town and then over toward the river. I drove along for a while. Things looked sort of familiar, but not really.

Then I saw it, a little gravel turnout. A pickup truck was parked there. A man standing in the bed of the truck was pitching trash onto the ground. I could see a rifle hanging in a rack in the truck's rear window. The road leading down to the landing was covered with old stoves, garbage, broken toys, a smoldering mattress, some other junk. I kind of wished I hadn't come.

It was raining a little. The man in the pickup truck threw a broken stroller onto the ground and gave me a look that said, "Let go of the past, son. Go back before Hertz charges you for an extra day." I took a picture and drove away.

—David Owen



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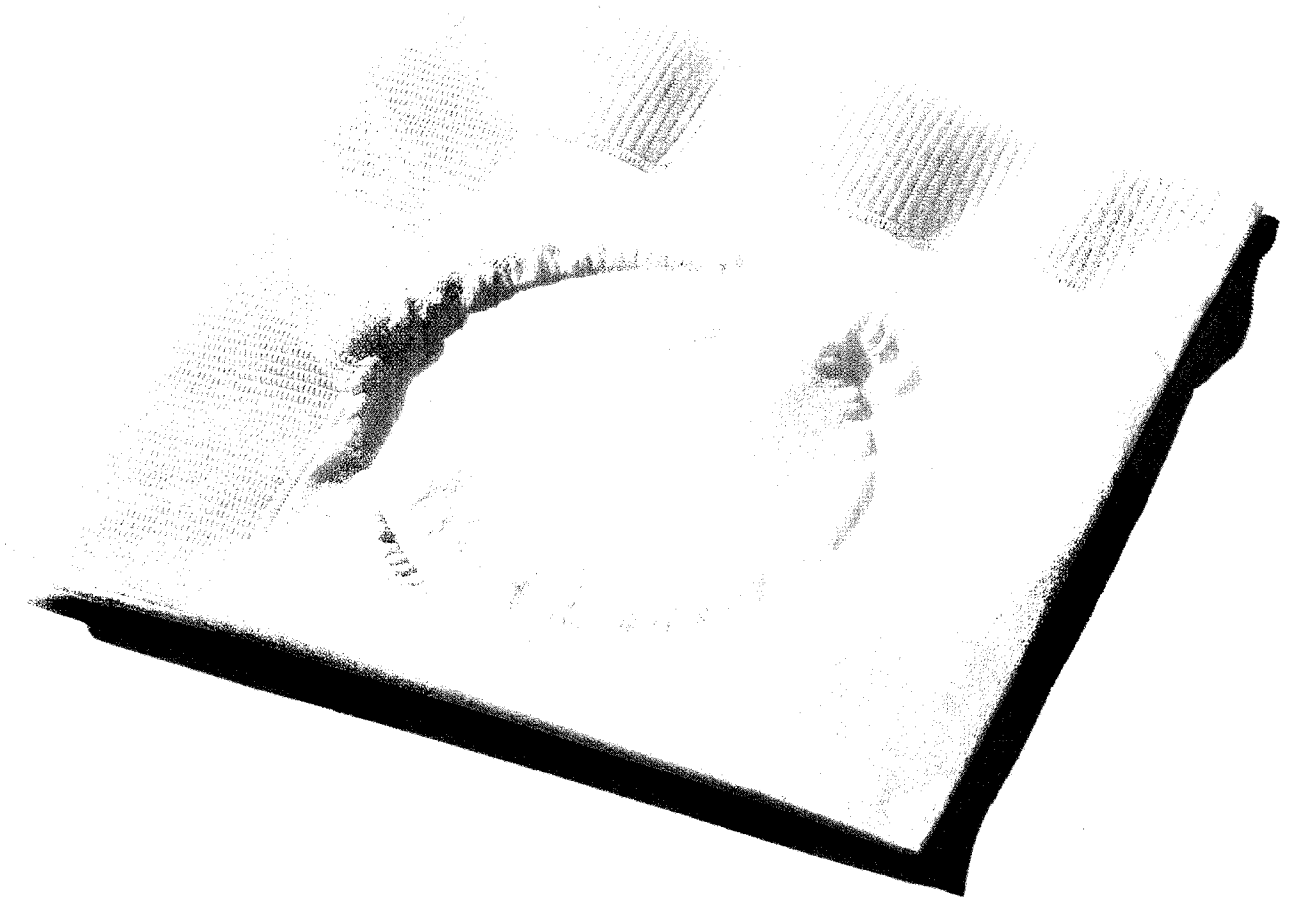
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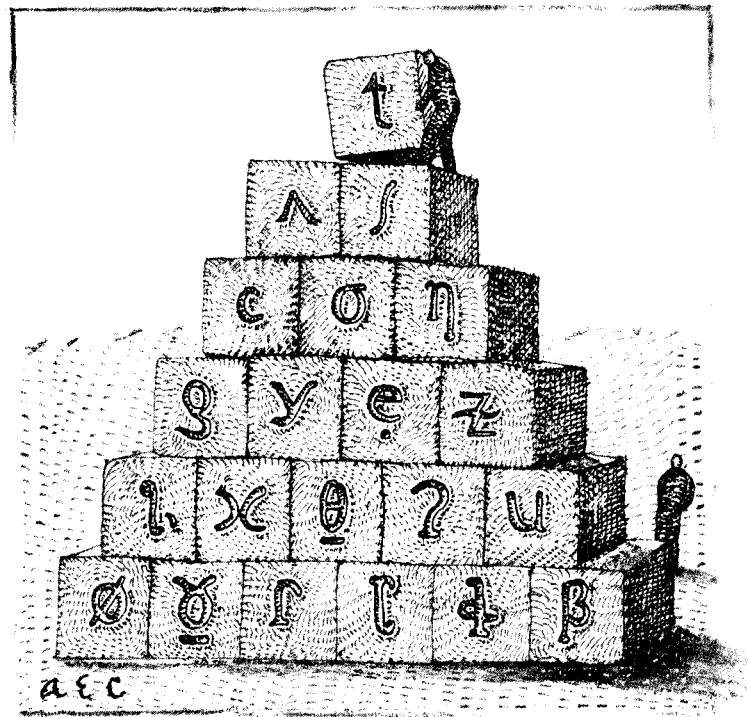
SCOTS WHISKY

UNCOMMONLY SMOOTH

*The story behind the search for "proto-World,"
a primeval language that most linguists believe will never be found, that many believe
never existed, but that some say they're already piecing together*

QUEST FOR THE MOTHER TONGUE

BY ROBERT WRIGHT



LINGUISTICS HAS LONG BEEN A HAVEN FOR Soviet intellectuals of a contrary sort. In the pre-Gorbachev era, when the study of history and economics and nearly everything else involving human beings was tailored to exacting Marxist specifications, the study of language was exempt. It had been deemed in 1950 to have no connection with ideology (and had been so deemed by no less an authority than Joseph Stalin, who considered himself something of an expert on language). So linguists were free to say whatever they wanted—about language, at least—without fear of rebuke. Naturally, the discipline attracted a number of people with a disdain for authority, and developed a culture that tended to reinforce this disdain. Maybe, then, it isn't surprising that Vitaly Shevoroshkin, a linguist at the University of Michigan who immigrated to America from the Soviet Union in 1974, has

spent much of the time since then waging a guerrilla war against orthodoxies of Western thought.

Shevoroshkin doesn't look much like a guerrilla leader. A more plausible guess as to his occupation would be: leader of a philosophical school whose upshot is unmitigated despair. He is a fifty-eight-year-old man with long, swept-back silver hair, a thick beard, and dark, forlorn eyes. Tall and thin, he walks gravely, with his shoulders slightly hunched over, as if he has long lived under the burden of some insight into the human condition which you would just as soon he didn't share with you. Watching him move pensively across a campus lawn at dusk, his coat draped over his shoulders like a cape, you would never suspect that he possessed the energy, much less the ferocity, to lead an insurrection.

But beneath that somber exterior lurks an excitable man, fully capable of raising his voice, vigorously ges-

ticulating, and vehemently denouncing an assortment of people and things. This fact is most reliably demonstrated by walking up to him and mentioning the name of some Western linguist who disagrees with him about the history of the world's languages—which is to say, just about any Western linguist who has ventured an opinion on the subject. Take, for example, Calvert Watkins, of Harvard: “He falsifies facts,” Shevoroshkin says. “He just falsifies facts.” So, it seems, does Juha Janhunen, a Finnish linguist, though perhaps Janhunen can be forgiven, since “apparently he is a fool.” And as for Ives Goddard, of the Smithsonian Institution, and Lyle Campbell, of Louisiana State University, both prominent in the study of American Indian languages: “Their brains are so twisted,” Shevoroshkin marvels, his voice verging on bemusement, which it rarely does.

Something is being gained in translation here. Shevoroshkin speaks English imperfectly. If he knew that Americans generally reserve the term “twisted” for a select subset of felons, he doubtless would have described Goddard and Campbell more moderately—as, say, “fools.” Similarly, “falsifies facts,” upon elaboration, turns out to be the rough equivalent of “interprets the evidence wrongheadedly.” Still, you get the picture: Shevoroshkin takes linguistics seriously. Specifically, he takes seriously a school of linguistics called Nostratics, which was confined to the Soviet Union during most of the Cold War and is just now beginning to get a broad airing in the West.

A basic tenet of Nostratics is that Western comparative linguists, in classifying the world's languages and thus tracing their historical lineage, have been too timid. Western linguists, by virtual consensus, consider the largest language family in Eurasia to be Indo-European, which encompasses the languages native to most of Europe and to a stretch of land extending southeast through Iran and India. What this means in historical terms is that all these languages, from English to Bengali, are descended from a single language, “proto-Indo-European,” thought to have been spoken at least 5,000 years ago. So far so good, the Nostraticists say. But they then go further and ask the next logical questions: From what language did proto-Indo-European descend, and what other modern language families, if any, are also descended from the proto-Indo-European? Most Indo-Europeanists shy away from these questions, citing a lack of evidence.

Nostraticists are not known for shying away from questions. According to classic Nostratic doctrine, the Indo-European language family is only one of six branches of a much larger family. This “superfamily”—the Nostratic family—extends to the south, covering languages of northern Africa and the Middle East (and languages of India unaccounted for by Indo-European), and well to the north and east, covering scores of languages from Finland through Siberia all the way to Korea and Japan. The idea is that all these languages are offshoots of the

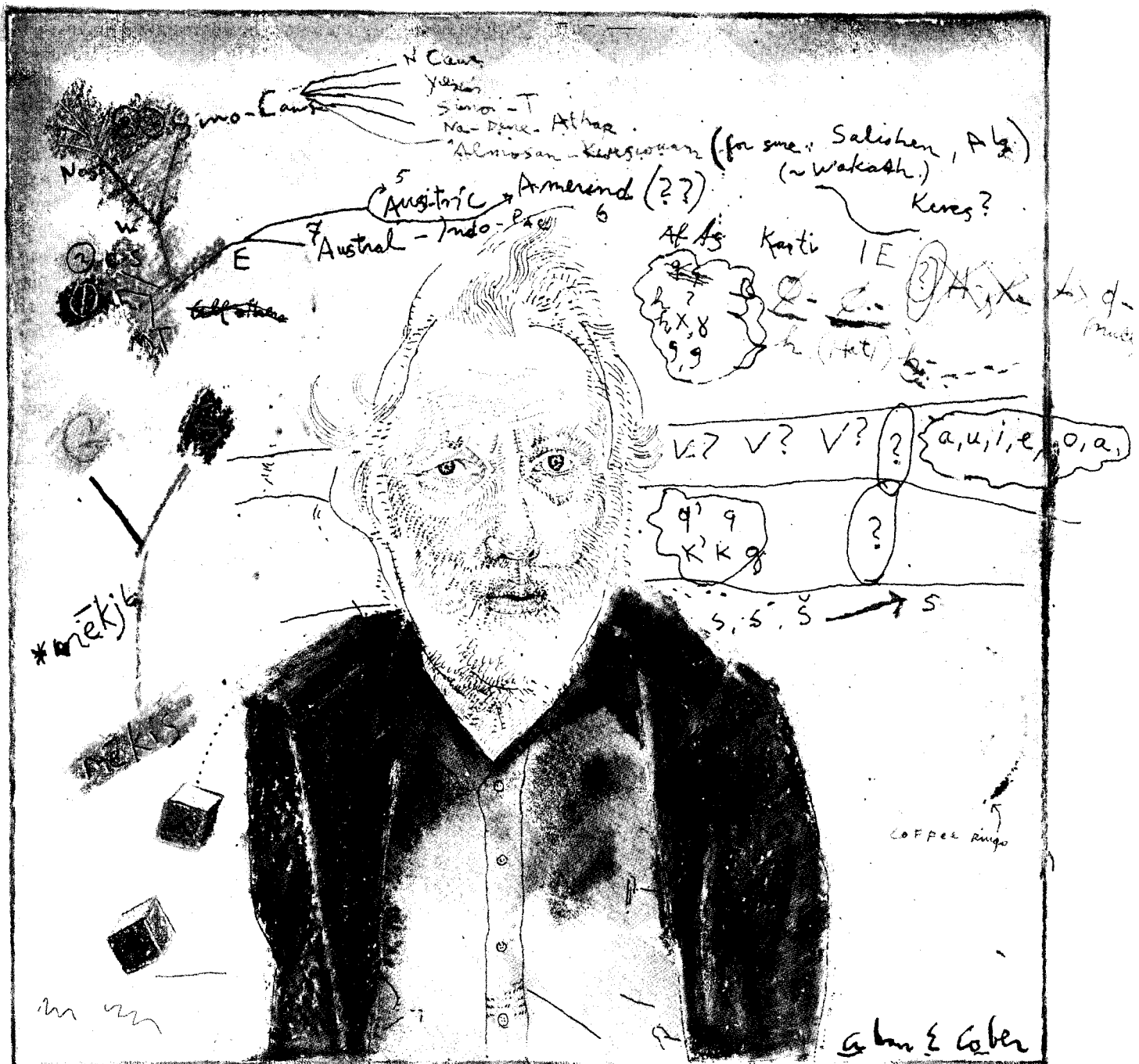
proto-Nostratic tongue, spoken by a people who lived more than 10,000 years ago. Nostraticists, through the arcane detective work that is a primary pastime of comparative linguists, have reconstructed this language. They have compiled a dictionary containing hundreds of proto-Nostratic words, modeled after the proto-Indo-European dictionaries that have long been accepted in the West as standard reference works.

The assertion that proto-Nostratic actually existed, though sufficient to inflame a number of American linguists, is innocuous compared with the second part of Shevoroshkin's world view: the Nostratic phylum is itself historically related to the handful of other great language families Shevoroshkin sees in the world, which means that all of them are descended from a common tongue. This language—called, variously, proto-Human, proto-World, and the Mother Tongue—would have been spoken 50,000, 100,000, maybe even 150,000 years ago, probably in Africa, and then diffused across the globe. And here's the kicker, the thing that gives Shevoroshkin a rock-solid basis for his bunker mentality: he believes not only that proto-World's past existence is apparent but that proto-World itself is apparent, its primordial elements distinctly visible in modern languages, as refracted through eons of linguistic evolution. He says we can now begin reconstructing proto-World, the basic vocabulary from which all the world's known languages have sprung.

You might think that after years of being either disputed or ignored by virtually every relevant American scholar, Shevoroshkin would be depressed, embittered, devoid of hope. You would be wrong about the devoid-of-hope part. Shevoroshkin has a plan. One day, sitting across from me at a table in Moscow's Institute for Slavic and Baltic Studies, where a linguistics conference had attracted many old friends of his, he said, “Today many people came to me who need me, and I say, ‘No, I am busy with this journalist, and I have to make it first.’” This priority—giving mass dissemination to his views on language—is the core of what could be called a trickle-up strategy of intellectual influence: new ideas that are resisted by powerful professors can spread first through the masses and then infiltrate American universities by way of fresh young minds. “What I want, I want new students—new people, just coming to us with good heads, but heads free of those [Western] dogmas,” he says.

The trickle-up strategy is enjoying preliminary success. Within the past year Shevoroshkin and his version of the history of language have gotten quite a bit of publicity, almost all of it favorable. In fact, to read the popular science press, you might gather that Shevoroshkin's view is the received view, and that historical linguists are closing in on proto-World as inexorably as molecular biologists are deciphering the human genome.

But meanwhile, back in Moscow, trouble is brewing. Shevoroshkin's fellow Nostraticists are growing displeased. Though they like Shevoroshkin, and value the



work he's done in publicizing Nostratics, a number are put out by all his talk of proto-World. They fear that it is only confusing Westerners about what Nostratics is and giving Nostraticists a reputation for wild-eyed speculation. This isn't to say that many of them doubt the past existence of a proto-World language; it's just that now may not be the ideal time to dwell on the subject—and certainly not to dwell on it in the manner that Shevoroshkin does. Some of the claims he has been making about proto-World, his fellow Nostraticists observe, could stand a bit more—how do you say?—nuance. He tends to get carried away, and journalists seem to abet this tendency.

VITALY V. SHEVOROSHKIN

But the Moscow Nostraticists are in solid agreement with Shevoroshkin about one thing: what a frustrating group of people American comparative linguists are. They have a way of casually dismissing, or simply ignoring, interesting ideas. Almost none of them, for example, has more than taken a glance at the Nostratic thesis. And as for proto-World: it isn't as if the Americans are confident that there *wasn't* a single language ancestral to all modern tongues; it isn't that they have good reason to believe that human language appeared in several different places and flourished in separate stocks. Rather, they seem possessed at once by concerns about overextrapolating from the linguistic data

and a reluctance to look elsewhere for clues. Clues exist, including an influx of intriguing new data from genetics which shed light on how the world came to be populated and how its different peoples are related.

Joseph Greenberg, of Stanford University, the only eminent American comparative linguist who strongly believes in proto-World (and who believed in it before Shevoroshkin started talking about it), summarizes the willful agnosticism of most American linguists by paying them a caustic compliment. "They have succeeded," he says, "in suppressing their curiosity." Shevoroshkin is similarly impressed. "They are not interested in many things which *are* interesting," he says. He is referring specifically to his colleagues at Michigan, but he then proceeds to generalize beyond them with what is either a deft bit of sarcasm or a pioneering use of terminology. "And that's the American way," he says.

The Comparative Method

"THE FORMATION OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES and of distinct species, and the proofs that both have been developed through a gradual process, are curiously the same," Charles Darwin wrote in 1871. The germ of this observation is the fact that the elements of language, like the elements of biology, change over the course of generations. Change can occur in sound or meaning or both. Eight hundred years ago a "foul stench" was a *ful stunch*, and this phonetic shift is nothing compared with the semantic fate that befell *ful*. In its day *ful* was the closest thing to an all-purpose conveyor of negativity. But then the precursor of "bad" appeared, almost literally out of nowhere. As near as anyone can tell, the Middle English *badde* came from the Old English *bæddel*, which referred to an androgynous person. Apparently *bæddel*'s pejorative sense grew until it encompassed everything warranting condemnation, and the frequency and scope with which *ful* was used suffered commensurately.

Like biological evolution, linguistic evolution looks glacial up close. The ceaseless drift in pronunciation is seldom noticeable in the course of a generation, and meaning, though more mercurial, doesn't change overnight. (It has taken nearly a century for the modern sense of the word "gay"—in a rough reversal of the history of "bad"—to eclipse the older, more diffuse sense.) Still, as in biology, gradual change adds up, eventually transforming the entire corpus. Here is the first line of the Lord's Prayer from six centuries ago: "*Oure fadir that art in heuenes, halwid be thi name.*" Here it is from ten centuries ago: "*Faeder ure thu the eart on heofonum, si thin nama gehalgod.*"

Go back three or four more centuries, and you wind up with a specimen ancestral not only to modern English but also to modern German. Languages, like animal species, branch out, with a single stock sprouting multiple stocks,

which in turn do the same. So comparative linguists, in the manner of zoologists, can inspect existing languages for common traits, draw inferences about their historical relationship (if any), and depict the results as a treelike diagram of descent.

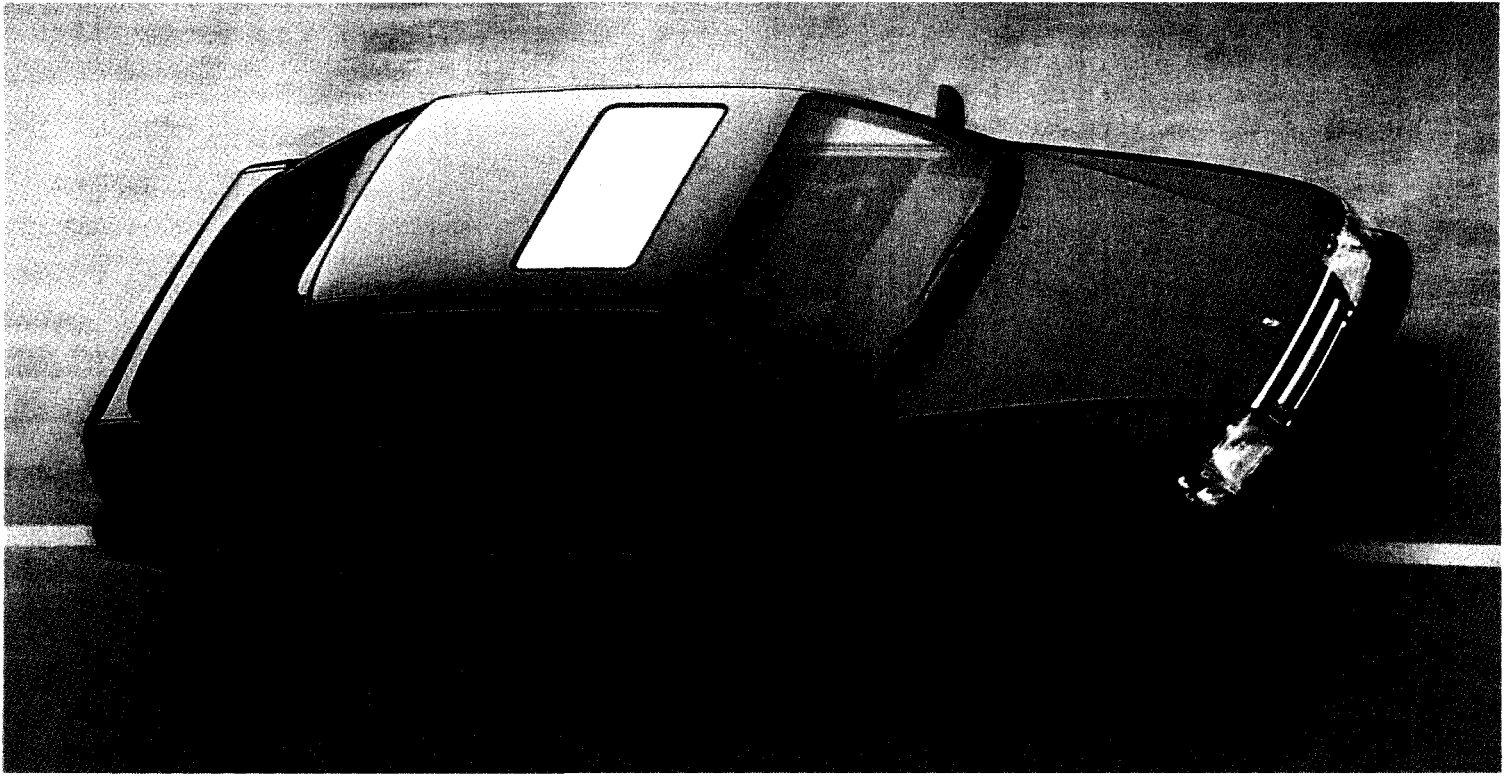
If the parallels between linguistic and biological evolution were as neat as this thumbnail summary makes them sound, disagreement among comparative linguists would be less profound and more muted. But they aren't. Different languages, unlike different species, commonly interbreed. Words, and even elements of grammar, may spread from one language to another when cultures meet through conquest or commerce. The words "beef" and "veal" come from French, courtesy of the Normans, who invaded England in 1066. Any linguist who naively relied on the close similarity between these words and their modern French counterparts (*boeuf* and *veau*) might be misled into thinking that the two languages diverged only a millennium or so ago. In truth, the lineages to which English and French belong—the Germanic and the Romance languages—parted ways several millennia ago, a remoteness of kinship better reflected in comparing, say, "tooth" and *dent* or "foot" and *pied*.

To complicate things further, languages, by definition, leave no prehistoric fossils. Indo-Europeanists have benefited from written sources going back 3,700 years (tablets in the extinct Indo-European language of Hittite), but writings of that age are sparse, and writings of twice that age are nonexistent. The older the hypothetical proto-language, the less informed by reality checks are the backward extrapolations used to reconstruct it.

A METHODOLOGY THAT COULD DISCERN LINGUISTIC history through all the fog matured during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By then similarities among various Indo-European languages had long been noted. But the inauguration of comparative Indo-European studies is commonly identified with an address delivered in 1786 to the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Sir William Jones, a prodigiously multilingual English judge and scholar who had moved to India and had learned Sanskrit. Jones noted resemblances between Sanskrit and Latin, and between Sanskrit and Greek, which were stronger, as he put it, "than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists." Moreover, he saw reason to believe that both Gothic, an early Germanic language, and Celtic, ancestor of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh, "though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of Persia."

In retrospect, some of these insights seem less than superhuman. The similarity among the Latin, Greek, and

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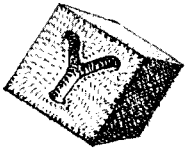
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**You might think that after years of being either
disputed or ignored by American scholars,
Shevoroshkin would be depressed, embittered, devoid of hope.
You would be wrong about the devoid-of-hope part.**

Sanskrit words for, say, “foot”—*pedis*, *podos*, and *padas*—is not especially obscure. Neither are some Indo-European grammatical patterns, such as the tendency of Latin and Sanskrit verbs to have *m* near the end when used in the first person and *s* near the end in the second person. But during the nineteenth century, as linguists defined the Indo-European family in detail, it was the more subtle correspondences that came to fascinate them. Consider the relationship between *pedis*, *podos*, and *padas*, on the one hand, and the Gothic (early Germanic) *fotus*, on the other. Leaving aside any differences in the vowels (as they say in historical linguistics: Accidents happen to vowels), the *p* in Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit becomes an *f* in Germanic. And the *d* becomes a *t*. Why?

The answer, basically, is that this is how *p*'s and *d*'s in Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit behave. For example, the *p* in the Latin and Greek *pater* and the Sanskrit *pitár* is an *f* in the English (and therefore Germanic) “father.” The *d* in the Latin and Greek *duo* and the Sanskrit *duvâ* is a *t* in the English “two.” And there are too many such *p-f* and *d-t* matches to chalk up to chance; rather, they constitute general rules. These two rules, along with others for linking consonant sounds in Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Germanic, are today known as Grimm's Law, after Jacob Grimm, the German philologist who articulated them in 1822 (and who is better remembered for compiling folktales with his brother Wilhelm).

“Rules of phonological correspondence,” as Grimm's and other such laws are called, came to occupy a central place within comparative linguistics. Linguists spent much of the nineteenth century enmeshing the Indo-European languages in a web of rules so dense that no one could deny the kinship it embraced. Particularly active was a group of ambitious men called the Neo-Grammarians, who set out to explain all phonetic differences (in vowels and consonants alike) among the Indo-European languages. Any seeming violations of general rules, they insisted, could be explained by subtle variables, such as which vowel follows a consonant in the Latin form, or on which syllable the accent falls. By century's end the Neo-Grammarians had amassed reams of rules, rules explaining exceptions to those rules, rules explaining exceptions to the exceptions, and so on. The slogan of the Neo-Grammarians was “Phonetic laws are natural laws and have no exceptions.”

Today many linguists consider this claim to have been a bit exuberant, and some of the Neo-Grammarians'

more intricate “laws” have fallen into disrepute. Still, the basic rules of regular phonological correspondence remain a major source of self-esteem within comparative linguistics, evidence that this discipline is in some important sense a science. And it remains true that the bigger the challenge facing the rules, the more pleasure linguists seem to get out of wielding them. Explaining the difference between *podos* and *fotus*—which, after all, sound a little alike even to inexpert ears—doesn't get the juices flowing nearly as vigorously as bridging two clusters of letters that seem to have nothing in common.

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A LINGUIST WHO TAKES TANGIBLE pride in the rules of phonological correspondence is Eric Hamp, of the University of Chicago. Hamp is also a good example of a Shevoroshkin critic—a strong skeptic when it comes to proto-World and, indeed, to ambitious language classification, such as Nostratics, in general; he belongs, as he puts it, to the “conservative stick-in-the-mud faction”—that is to say, the mainstream of American and European comparative linguistics. Hamp is a short, slightly stout man of seventy who looks about sixty. He has ruddy cheeks and a bushy moustache that contains roughly as much hair as the entire rest of his head. He is a master of linguistic detail, the relentless pursuit of which commonly leads his conversation through a series of tangents and subtangents so long that he must be forcibly steered back toward the point he originally set out to make. This labyrinthine mode of thought is not the only thing that makes Hamp archetypally academic. His slightly nasal, highly resonant voice and his strict enunciation convey an emphasis on propriety that one might find in a turn-of-the-century headmaster. He pronounces “been” *bean* and “again” *a gain*.

Hamp is always willing to head for the blackboard and deliver a lecture on the perils of sacrificing methodological purity in trying to trace linguistic roots back too far. He picks up the chalk and creates three columns, one for French, one for Romanian, and one for Armenian, and in each he writes the words for the numerals two through seven. All three of these languages are Indo-European—but how, he asks, would you know by casual inspection that the odd-looking Armenian words bear any relation to the others? Consider the words for “three.” How do you get from the French *trois* and the Romanian *trei* to the Armenian *erek*? Well, the rules of phonological correspondence take you there. “There is a rule in Armenian that

immediately before an *r*, a *t* will drop . . . And there's another rule in Armenian: No word can begin with an *r*. So it always grows a vowel," Hamp says. "Even a bizarre little thing like that we can account for every time." By the time he is finished, the strange Armenian words have been firmly planted in the Indo-European family. "Each one of these, we can explain them all," he says happily.

Now for the moral of the story. The seemingly unbridgeable phonetic chasm between *trois* and *erek'* opened up over the course of several thousand years. So what are the chances that an ancestral relationship among contemporary languages dating back 50,000 or 100,000 years, the supposed age of proto-World, would be manifest today in the form of obvious look-alikes? Not great, Hamp believes. So how much use is there in trying to establish common ancestry dating back that far, as proto-World enthusiasts have been known to do, without the aid of commensurately deep rules of phonological correspondence? Not much, Hamp suggests. This is one reason that he refers to some of Shevoroshkin's pronouncements about proto-World as "moonshine." Hamp, a man who abhors the American advertising culture, who feels "very sincerely that something that needs plugging apparently has a defect somewhere," wonders at the energy with which Shevoroshkin touts the Moscow view of language. "He may have just figured out what American salesmanship is," Hamp says.

The Indo-Europeans

RESURRECTING DEAD AND UNFOSSILIZED LANGUAGES would be easier if the laws of phonetic change were simple and universal—if, for example, *p*'s always turned into *f*'s, given a millennium or two, and *f*'s were always the residue of former *p*'s. It doesn't work that way. Still, there are vaguer things that can be said about phonetic drift generally. For example, *p*'s often turn into *f*'s—and, moreover, *f*'s almost never become *p*'s. (Try uttering *pf*, then try *fp*. Doesn't the second effort feel more like a struggle against biomechanical forces?)

An example of how this sort of rough directionality comes in handy is the reconstruction of the proto-Indo-European word for "birch." Here is the word in four Indo-European languages, each drawn from a different main stock: German (Germanic) *birke*, Lithuanian (Baltic) *berzas*, Ossetian (Iranian) *barz*, and Sanskrit (Indic) *bhurja*. To judge sheerly by numbers, you might guess that the third consonant in the proto-Indo-European word was a relatively soft sound—like the *z* in *berzas* or the *j* in *bhurja*—and that through a freak mutation it got hardened in the German *birke*. But it turns out that such a mutation would be freakish indeed. It is common for "velors" (*k* or a hard *g*) to shift into "affricates" (*ch* or *j*, respectively), and even to slip further, winding up as "fricatives" (*s* or *z*), but the reverse is almost unheard of. So it

looks as if the third consonant sound in the proto-Indo-European "birch" was a hard sound, a velor. Specifically—after much further rumination—the word has been reconstructed as **bherag*. (The asterisk denotes reconstruction.)

Thousands of proto-Indo-European words have been reconstituted. How much confidence they warrant is debatable. In 1862 the German philologist August Schleicher completed one of the first reconstructions of proto-Indo-European and was so pleased with himself that he ceremoniously translated a short fable into the proto-language. Later developments, ranging from the findings of the Neo-Grammarians to the discovery of Hittite hieroglyphics, reflected badly on much of his work. Today's reconstructions are assuredly more accurate than Schleicher's, but the fate of his proto-Indo-European fable has discouraged their architects from repeating his ritual.

At any rate, the letter-for-letter accuracy of each reconstructed word is in some ways moot. For historians and archaeologists, how the Indo-Europeans pronounced the word for "birch" is less important than that they did pronounce it: apparently they lived somewhere in the vicinity of birch trees. And "birch" is just the tip of the iceberg. There is a whole book called *Proto-Indo-European Trees*, and countless hours have been spent trying to infer the Indo-Europeans' homeland from their flora and fauna. Maps of Europe and southwestern Asia have been drawn with birch zones, beech zones, beaver zones, and so forth, in hopes of finding a region common to all. It hasn't worked. Argument about the proto-Indo-European homeland persists.

Early in this century these innocent-sounding attempts to flesh out the Indo-European people got mixed in with some sordid political currents, and there are those who believe that the intense devotion of some Moscow linguists to the Nostratic thesis can be understood only in this historical light. The trouble begins with inferences about Indo-European culture. Words have been reconstructed for "cow" (**gwou*), "horse" (**ekwo*, as in *equestrian*), "sheep," and "dog," and for at least one kind of cereal grain. A word for some sort of metal suggests mining. There are also signs of religion, with a patriarchal society of gods. (The Indo-European precursor of the Roman god Jupiter is **dyeu-pater*, and its halves are precursors of the words "deity" and "father.") All told, the Indo-Europeans seem to have been in the cultural stage known as late Neolithic, characterized by agriculture, polished (as opposed to chipped) stone tools, and incipient metallurgy.

What has struck scholars about this is its implication that the Indo-Europeans weren't culturally ahead of their neighbors. Most comparative linguists believe that proto-Indo-European was spoken 5,000 or 6,000 years ago, and by then late-Neolithic culture was widespread, from modern-day Iran to the north of modern Germany.



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Hence the riddle of the Indo-Europeans: If they weren't technologically equipped to dominate their neighbors, then how did their language move so far so fast?

There's been no shortage of guesses, but the most historically consequential is that the language was propelled by brute force. The Indo-Europeans, in this view, were strapping, chariot-riding Nordics who swiftly subjugated Europe and southern Asia; these were the Aryan supermen of Hitler's dreams. The idea of Nordic Indo-Europeans was given currency by, among others, the esteemed Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, in the 1926 book *The Aryans*. Its final sentence states that "the Nordics' superiority in physique fitted them to be the vehicles of a superior language." Nazis worked hard (to Childe's discomfort) at keeping such ideas in circulation.

The Finnish linguist Janhunen finds it notable that Nostratic studies, which blossomed during the 1960s, two decades after the Holocaust, gave Hebrew (and other Semitic languages) a kinship with the Indo-European languages, including German. And the proto-World hypothesis casts the net of kinship even wider. "I'm very glad to emphasize the unity of humankind and the need of brotherhood," Janhunen says. "But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be different." Sometimes, Janhunen says, he gets the impression that the Nostraticists' belief in deep linguistic unities is "a kind of religion."

Shevoroshkin, informed of this view, undergoes a shift in demeanor from dour to agonized. "How much I don't like this kind of stuff," he says. Just imagine, if the Janhunen of the world persist in these claims, the potentially adverse effect on recruiting. A young linguist on the verge of a lifelong commitment to the Nostratic thesis "would listen to them and say, 'Well, if it is like that, no, better not.' And that is why I am so angry about all this."

Janhunen is not the only one who deems the birth of Nostratics illegitimate. Others have imagined that the Nostratic hypothesis was a Communist attempt to unite native Soviet languages. Both claims run into complications early on. In particular, the Nostratic thesis was formulated a decade before the Second World War, outside the Soviet Union. This isn't to say that its author, a Dane named Holger Pedersen, was oblivious of its unifying overtones. The idea of an Indo-European super-race had been in the air since the late nineteenth century, and Pedersen seemed to stress the inclusive effect of his proposed language phylum, calling it Nostratic, from the Latin root for "ours."

The Nostraticists

DURING THE 1930S SOVIET LINGUISTS WERE IN no position to document Pedersen's thesis. Until 1950 comparative linguistics was banned in the Soviet Union, by order of a linguist named Nikolay Yakovlevich Marr. Marr was to Soviet linguistics roughly what Lysenko was to Soviet biology—

the man who, by wielding the seal of official intellectual approval, enforced continuing harmony between Marxist and other theory. His ever-shifting ideas about language are hard to sort out; his basic doctrine was, as one Soviet linguist puts it, "different at different points, but it was always crazy." And it was always hostile to comparative linguistics. Marr despised the sort of Indo-European elitism that Childe's writing exudes, considering it an affront to the oppressed everywhere. His followers referred to Indo-European studies as "the whore of imperialism."

In some ways Marr's repression of Indo-European studies worked against Stalin's interests. The Indo-European family implies the close kinship of the Russian and other Slavic languages, such as Ukrainian, Polish, and Czechoslovakian. And one Soviet goal was to bind speakers of those languages more closely under the banner of socialism. It may have been to further the pan-Slavic cause that Stalin finally renounced Marrism, in 1950. Thereafter linguists were bound by only one patriotic duty: to cite Stalin's amateur work on linguistics approvingly in each paper. "I did not like this," recalls Shevoroshkin, who began his university studies in 1951. "Because you always have to start, like, 'As this genius of all these people, Comrade Stalin, says . . .'" But in 1953 Stalin died, and everything was all right.

It was the expansive atmosphere of sudden freedom that nurtured the minds of the two Russians who founded modern Nostratics: Vladislav Illich-Svitych and Aharon Dolgopolsky, who worked at separate institutes in the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Dolgopolsky, now sixty, is an immediately likable man who makes one wish that words like "mirthful" and "animated" hadn't been devalued by overuse, so well do they fit him. As for Illich-Svitych, not much can be confidently said about him. He died in 1966, at age thirty-one, and today is spoken of by Moscow linguists in such reverential tones as to cast their objectivity into question. (It is no easy task to get them to describe him without using the word "genius.") He does seem to have been, at the very least, an extremely smart and preternaturally productive man. He was out fetching kerosene for the lamps by which he studied at night when he was fatally hit by a car. Legend has it that he was crossing the street absentmindedly, absorbed in thoughts of Nostratics.

THE NOSTRATIC FAMILY, AS DEFINED BY ILLICH-Svitych in the 1960s, encompasses about half of the world's people and the great bulk of its land mass: North Africa, Australia, almost all of the Western Hemisphere, and all of Eurasia except for China and southeastern Asia and a few small splotches here and there. It comprises Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic (including the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Arabic), Uralic-Yukaghir (including Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, and obscure languages endemic to the northwestern Soviet Union), Altaic (which stretches immensely from

southwestern to northeastern Asia, encompassing the Turkish languages, Mongolian, various Siberian languages, Japanese, and Korean—although these last two were often left out in the 1960s, and still are by some today), Kartvelian (including Georgian), and the Dravidian languages of southern India. The Eskimo-Aleut language family, which reaches from the Aleutian Islands across Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland, has since been annexed by the Nostraticists.

To Dolgopolsky and Illich-Svitych, the evidence seemed compelling. For one thing (as Pedersen had noted), most Nostratic daughter families seemed to exhibit the pattern that linguists long ago discovered in Indo-European: an inordinate number of *m*'s are used in the first-person singular and *t*'s or *s*'s in the second-person singular (as in the English "me" and the Middle English "thou"). "It strikes the imagination," Dolgopolsky says. "If you take Finnish, 'I, thou' is *minna, sinna*. Now, in Turkic, it's *min, sin*. If you take Kartvelian, it's *man, shan*. Well—it's too much to be by chance." Moreover, comparison of basic vocabularies revealed many echoes. Thus Dolgopolsky noticed early on that the proto-Indo-European **melg* means "to milk" and the Arabic *mlg* means "to suck the breast," while the Ancient Egyptian *mng* means "breast" and so does the proto-Finno-Ugric **malʔe*.

This is the form the evidence generally took—fragmentary. Even today few proto-Nostratic roots are persuasively attested in all daughter families. Then again, the same is true for proto-Indo-European. Words fall by the wayside from time to time, or shift unrecognizably in meaning. Historical linguists have learned to live with imperfection.

Vladimir Dybo, Illich-Svitych's best friend, knew that the two men were working along parallel lines but concealed this from them for scientific reasons. He wanted their conclusions to crystallize before being compared. Dolgopolsky recalls the day Dybo finally introduced him to Illich-Svitych. "It was in Lenin's library," he says. "Dybo came, with a strange smile, and told me, 'Do you want to meet somebody?' And then Illich-Svitych appeared, and we began discussing what are the roots that both of us knew. . . . We were discussing—well—facts, roots which nobody knew they *exist*, but for us it was already a fact!"

In 1964 they went public with their work. Dolgopolsky published 166 clusters of seemingly cognate words found in two or more Nostratic daughter families. Illich-Svitych was then willing to disclose only twenty such etymologies, but in 1965 he released 600 proto-Nostratic reconstructions, along with rules of phonological correspondence to account for differences among cognates in the proto-languages of daughter families. He died the next year, and Dybo set out to amend and publish his work as a proto-Nostratic dictionary. Dolgopolsky, who assisted Dybo, is now at the University of Haifa, in Israel, finishing his own dictionary.

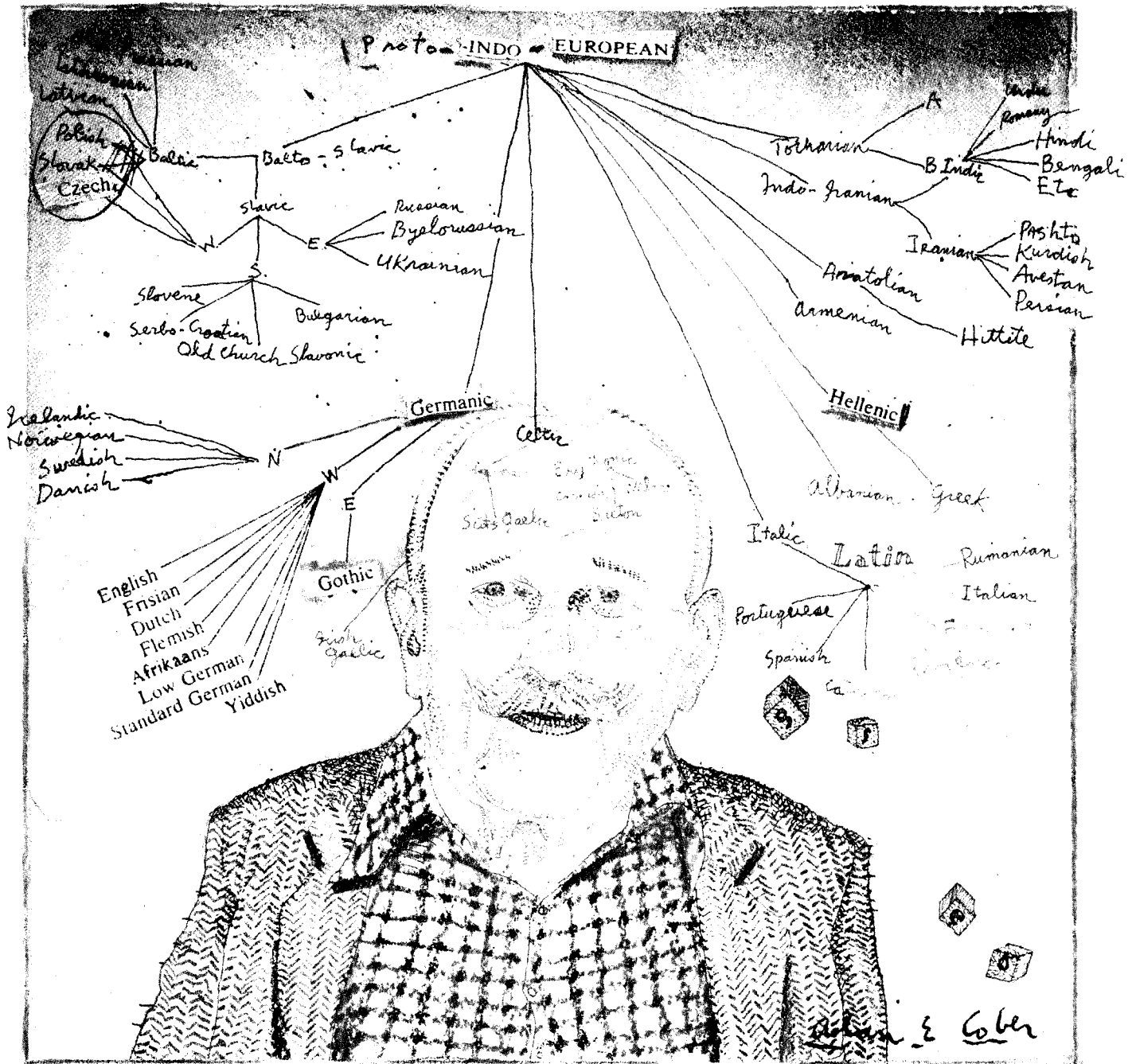
The hypothetical Nostratic people, to judge by their vocabulary, were (not surprisingly) far behind the Indo-Europeans culturally. They had pottery and weaving but no metallurgy, and there are no signs of religion, excepting a belief in magical spells. There was no agriculture. The domestication of dogs, apparently, either had not begun or was just beginning; a single root (**küjna*) evolved into "wolf" in some Nostratic languages and "dog" (the English "hound") in others. There are words for "berry," for "antelope," for "deer," for "cooking food on hot stones." All this fits into the hunter-gatherer way of life common in the late Paleolithic period, which drew to an end around 15,000 years ago.

Fifteen thousand years is a long time—a fact that skeptics of Nostratics have been known to point out. Resurrecting proto-Indo-European, which had been dead for 5,000 to 7,000 years, was hard enough. How can linguists expect to look back 10,000 or 15,000 years and see anything very clearly? The Nostraticists' answer is that Illich-Svitych and Dolgopolsky have generally used as their starting point the reconstructed proto-languages of daughter families, such as proto-Indo-European and proto-Uralic, rather than the modern members of those families. Assuming the proto-languages are accurate, this amounts to a leap from the known into the unknown of merely 6,000 or 8,000 years, roughly the same span covered by Indo-Europeanists. Granted, Indo-Europeanists had some fossil guideposts—ancient languages, such as Sanskrit and Hittite, frozen between the proto-language and now. But there is enough evidence in modern languages alone to define the Indo-European family pretty confidently, and to hazily envision proto-Indo-European.

Besides, the Nostraticists say, the proof is in the pudding. They point to the reconstructed proto-language and to Illich-Svitych's rules of phonological correspondence. And they do so with pride. For these embody the canonical method of comparative linguistics, the thing that has given the Indo-European family its unshakable status. Surely they should be enough to earn Nostratics the respect of mainstream Indo-Europeanists. Right?

GUESS AGAIN. WESTERN LINGUISTS ARE NOT IMPRESSED. Take Eric Hamp. He concedes that Illich-Svitych was "a real genius or near-genius." And he doesn't rule out the possibility that someday something like the Nostratic hypothesis will be worthy of respect. But he also says that Illich-Svitych was sometimes careless, and that for now the reasons to doubt Nostratics overwhelm any reasons to embrace it.

To begin with, reconstructed proto-Nostratic words strike Hamp as a bit more phonetically complex than proto-Indo-European words. The reason this seems suspicious is that *any* group of languages can be unified under the umbrella of a single proto-language if the proto-words are sufficiently complicated. Faced with synonyms in daughter languages 1, 2, and 3 which begin



with *x*, *y*, and *z*, one simply posits a consonant cluster in the proto-language—say, *pqrst*—and qualifies the rules of correspondence accordingly: an *x* in language 1 corresponds to a *y* in language 2 if the root sound in the proto-language is *pqrst*. Of course, proto-Nostratic doesn't have anything as shady-looking as *pqrst*. In fact, to a lay person, it looks no more cumbersome than proto-Indo-European. But it's more cumbersome than Hamp likes.

Hamp also complains about a certain scruffiness in some of the Nostratic etymologies, a problem he traces partly to the inherent difficulty of any one scholar's mastering the complexities of six language families. For ped-

ERIC P. HAMP

agogical purposes I once pulled out one of Illich-Svitych's 600 Nostratic etymologies and asked Hamp to evaluate it. It was for "berry," reconstructed as **marja*. The word was reflected in four daughter families: the proto-Indo-European **mor* for "mulberry" or "blackberry," the proto-Altaic **mür* for "berry," the proto-Uralic **marja* for "berry," and the proto-Kartvelian **mar-caw* for "strawberry." These looked pretty good to me—at least, the resemblances looked more than accidental. And given comparable sets of resemblances for 600 basic vocabulary items, as well as rules of phonological correspondence that account for some surface discrepancies, it seemed to me that this

Nostratic hypothesis deserved sustained consideration.

It didn't seem that way to Hamp. As soon as I mentioned the proto-Indo-European **mor*, he said, "I once wrote a note on that in the *American Journal of Philology*. I wasn't able to come up with a satisfactory reconstruction of that at all." Besides, notice how Illich-Svitych took a word for "strawberry" in Kartvelian and linked it with a word for "mulberry" in Indo-European: "That's a semantically slovenly way to operate." Actually, it seemed to me very much the way Indo-Europeanists operate. The descendants of the proto-Indo-European **ayos* ("ore" in English) denote different metals in different daughter languages. True, Hamp agreed, but given when the Indo-Europeans lived, it's quite plausible that they used only one metal—copper or bronze—and that the word for it was then applied to other metals upon their discovery. Before the Nostraticists are permitted to conjure up a comparable scenario for "berry," he said, they should be able confidently to "stipulate the specific climatology" of the proto-Nostratic homeland.

Hamp's overall view is shared by Calvert Watkins, of Harvard. He, too, says that Illich-Svitych played fast and loose with his etymologies, and that the Nostratic reconstructions and rules of correspondence don't amount to as neat and powerful a package as the Indo-European equivalent.

This sort of talk sends Shevoroshkin into conniptions. He says that the field of Nostratic studies is *more* precise than Indo-European studies. He says that Illich-Svitych was *more* careful than most Indo-Europeanists. And, as if it weren't bad enough for people like Hamp and Watkins to go around criticizing Nostratics, Watkins's recent tenure as the president of the Linguistic Society of America gave him "more authority than just being Watkins," Shevoroshkin says. "He can bring much more damage than before. Because . . . Okay, I say this, you write it down, then you call Watkins and ask him. And what he says just crisscrosses whatever I said. But I am right. He is wrong. But he is known. I am not."

If the truth be told, neither Watkins nor Hamp has spent a lot of man-hours poring over the Nostratic material. After examining a little of it, they were so put off by what Hamp calls its "visible flaws of reasoning" that they chose not to invest much more time. And—raising Shevoroshkin's blood pressure a little further—Hamp has largely relied not on Illich-Svitych's actual work but on interpretations of it by Allan Bomhard, an American convert to Nostratics who has failed to stay in Shevoroshkin's good graces. Shevoroshkin characterizes Bomhard's scholarly craftsmanship as "butchering." In this respect, he says, Bomhard is, "so to speak, a contrary to what Illich-Svitych was." The mere thought of Bomhard's allegedly ersatz Nostratics fixes Shevoroshkin's angst once again on images of young, bright, would-be recruits. "They certainly will see very easily that Bomhard is doing this kind of butchering. They *will*. And then they will

say, Okay, if this is Nostratic, we don't need it. And they would be right."

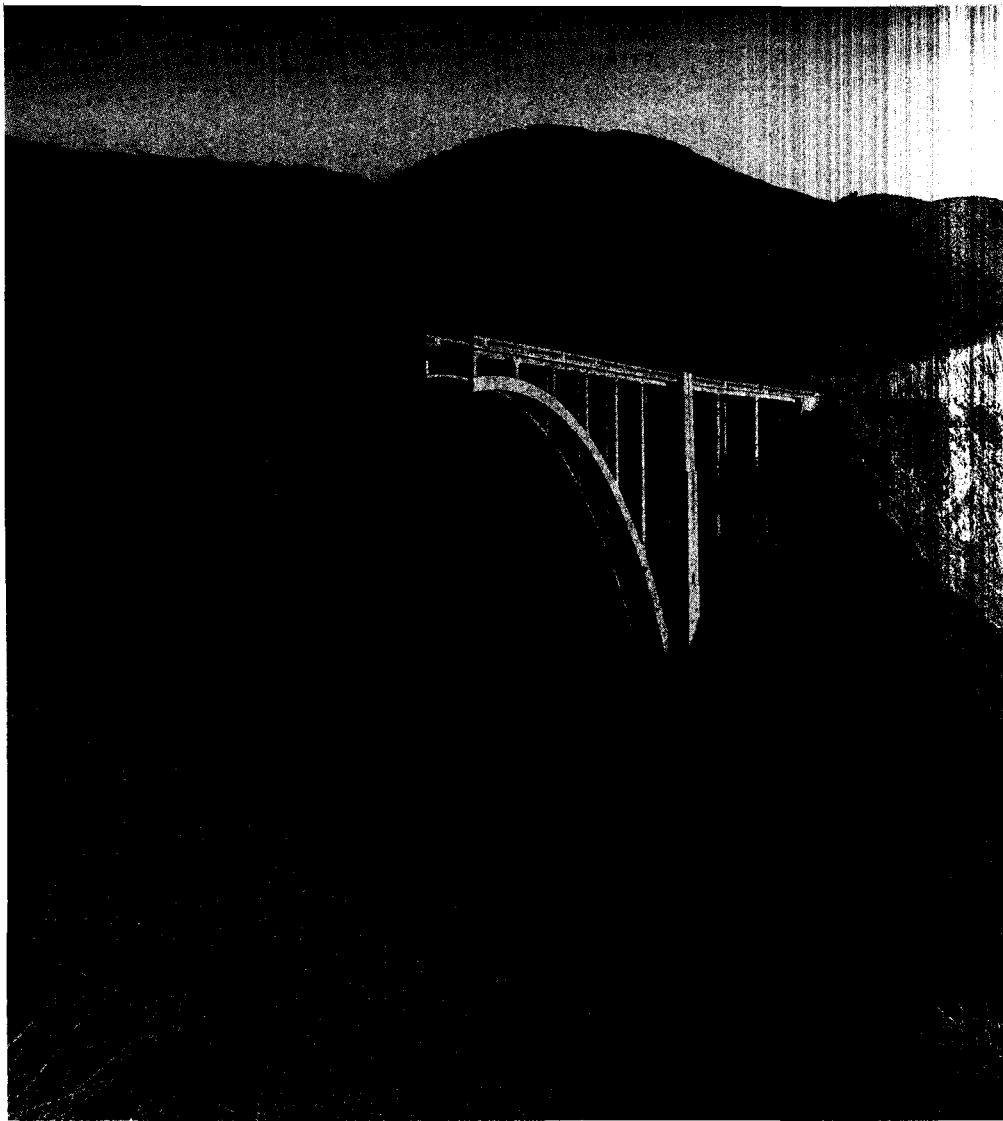
Zealotic Overkill

SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES, in the mid-1970s, Shevoroshkin established a pattern that has endured to this day: He lectured the American linguistics community on its shortcomings, and it paid no attention. He pointed to the insufficiently bold classifications of American Indian languages. He spoke of the need for Indo-Europeanists to broaden their horizons. He described pathbreaking research going on in Moscow. Nothing happened.

Gradually the fierce resistance of American linguists to enlightenment took a toll on Shevoroshkin's sense of well-being. Meanwhile, the University of Michigan, where he had settled into a tenured position in 1979, was becoming a less comfortable place. During the mid-1980s linguistics was downgraded from a department to a program, and a number of professors started feeling less cherished. Shevoroshkin felt utterly uncherished. "They just didn't like me, because I was doing something they are not doing and vice versa and things like that," he says. "I was an outsider, foreigner."

Thomas Markey, a retired Michigan linguistics professor who now runs a small Ann Arbor publishing house that has published some Nostratic work, says you have to understand how unpleasant Shevoroshkin's life at Michigan has been to understand the "zealotic overkill" he exhibits; his ever more ardent commitment to promoting the Moscow view of language began as a way of coping. Markey remembers telling Shevoroshkin, "Forget what's happening to you here. Forget the daily hassles. You've got a mission." Markey believes that "the zeal was there; it was just a matter of fanning the flames."

With the help of a local journalist Shevoroshkin started doing some popular writing about Nostratics. This caused reporters to call him. He noticed that their questions always led him back in time: If Indo-European was part of Nostratic, was Nostratic part of some even bigger family? And the closer his answers came to proto-World, the more interested they got. Actually, proto-World was something Shevoroshkin hadn't given a lot of thought to. Though he suspected that all languages came from one source, and had seen signs of it here and there, he didn't consider this a vital area for study. But the journalists persisted, asking "about further, further, further relations," he says. "And sooner or later I started answering these questions that, yes, it seems so." The ensuing years saw discernible growth in the amount of attention Shevoroshkin received. "LINGUISTS DIG DEEPER INTO ORIGINS OF LANGUAGE." "THE ROOTS OF LANGUAGE: HOW MODERN SPEECH EVOLVED FROM A SINGLE, ANCIENT SOURCE." The trickle-up strategy was beginning to work.



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But phase two of the trickle-up strategy—the actual trickle-up part—has yet to kick in. Nostraticists have various explanations for why so few American linguists have gone even as far as Hamp and Watkins and at least read some of the Nostratic material. One is that most of it, in particular Illich-Svitych's dictionary, has not been published in English. Another is a natural reluctance to venture beyond one's cozy realm of expertise and risk making celebrated blunders. This haunting prospect looms in many fields, but nowhere larger than in comparative linguistics, where mastery of detail is so highly prized.

Shevoroshkin, in a moment of weakness, once came close to expressing sympathy for Indo-Europeanists who shun Nostratics. "You study all your life. You study, let us say . . . proto-Indo-European, comparing a lot of languages, but just this branch. And let us say you are forty or fifty years old. You are the foremost specialist in your field, and you *are* a good specialist. And then somebody comes, maybe not an Indo-Europeanist even, and says, 'Look, you know only one sixth of what you have to know.' So you just, you know, kick them out—kick this guy out of your study, right? So that's how it is, you know?"

There are, to be sure, a handful of linguists in the United States who are sympathetic to Nostratics and proto-World. But they tend not to be at major universities or to possess great stature. (And a few of them are on cool terms with Shevoroshkin; they seem to have a way of committing errors that bring dishonor upon Nostratics, and thus are not easily forgiven.) Only one eminent American linguist embraces the idea of proto-World, and the idea of a Eurasian language phylum of Nostratic breadth, and the idea of ambitious classification generally, and he was talking about these things before Shevoroshkin came to the United States, seventeen years ago. He is Joseph Greenberg, a professor emeritus of linguistics at Stanford.

Greenberg holds the distinction of having been denounced by both Eric Hamp and Shevoroshkin. He classifies languages in a way that conservatives and many radicals alike find subversive. But whether Shevoroshkin likes it or not, Greenberg's methodology is now the tool of choice among scholars who look for ancestral affinities among all the world's language families.

The Greenberg Way

IF YOU READ THE ARTICLE ON JOSEPH GREENBERG IN the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, you will see that his legacy is divided about equally between language classification and other linguistic endeavors. His best-known classification covers Africa, whose nearly 1,500 native languages he began studying more than four decades ago. He emerged with the conclusion that each of them belongs to one of four phyla, and by 1963 he had precisely delineated the contours of these phyla, their

subphyla, sub-subphyla, and so on. This work was at first hotly disputed, but today it stands, with some refinement, as solid.

If you fail to consult the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Greenberg will be happy to fill in the details. Surprisingly, his eagerness to do this—and his casual mentions of various other feats (he's "sort of the founder of modern typology")—are not obnoxious. This is partly because Greenberg is a plain-speaking, unpretentious man, and partly because he is clearly acting in self-defense. For all the esteem amassed in the course of his career, Greenberg has lately been an object of intense criticism, even outright derision, and he is not above doing a little credential-flashing in response. In particular he would like it known that the method he uses to classify languages—a veritable magnet for contempt these days—has a history of prevailing over widespread doubt.

Greenberg's methodology was most recently put on display in his 1987 book *Language in the Americas*. Therein he takes the roughly 1,000 known Native American languages and organizes them into three families: Eskimo-Aleut, to the far north; Na-Dene, confined mainly to Canada; and Amerind, which stretches all the way from southern Canada to Tierra del Fuego, an expanse conventionally thought to contain more like 100 or 200 valid language families. This tripartite scheme meshes with Greenberg's belief that prehistoric Eurasians crossed the Bering Strait in three great migrations, beginning more than 10,000 years ago with speakers of an early Amerind language, and ending with the arrival of the Eskimo, millennia later. The scholarly feedback accorded Greenberg's ideas about American Indian languages is more or less typified by the suggestion several years ago by Lyle Campbell, of Louisiana State University, that Greenberg be "shouted down." Campbell says he finds it "really depressing" that the proto-World publicity blitz has lately brought Greenberg some uncritical popular attention. He compares Greenberg to the scientist who last year predicted an early December earthquake in New Madrid, Missouri, and then (through November, at least) basked in publicity while his soberer colleagues labored in obscurity. Campbell's fellow American Indianist Ives Goddard, of the Smithsonian, uses a different simile. He says Greenberg's Amerind thesis is like the claims made for cold fusion. (As for the reconstruction of proto-World: Campbell compares it to medieval alchemy, Goddard to the search for Bigfoot.)

Greenberg is not a very excitable man. He dislikes confrontation, which may be one reason he sometimes skips conferences at which he is slated for excoriation. In discussing his critics he generally avoids personal attacks, though he does have a weakness for oblique sarcasm. (He has noted that if there are indeed 200 truly independent Native American language families, there must have been a prehistoric "traffic controller at the Bering Strait.") For the most part Greenberg just sits there and



When explaining his heretical ideas Greenberg sometimes gives a shrug, as if any fairly bright person, unhampered by the blinding pedantries of conventional methodology, could have seen what he's seen.

exudes what seem to be common sense and simple wisdom. When explaining his heretical ideas he sometimes gives a shrug, as if any fairly bright person, unhampered by the blinding pedantries of conventional methodology, could have seen what he's seen. "I just followed the facts," he says in a Brooklyn accent that resonates with the earthiness of his approach.

Language classification Greenberg-style consists of just three simple steps. First, forget all this stuff about rules of phonological correspondence. Second, forget all this stuff about reconstructing proto-languages. Third, write down words from a lot of different languages, look at them, and wait for similarities to leap out. Actually, the process is a little more time-consuming than this suggests. Greenberg sits in libraries extracting information from primary sources—word lists and dictionaries compiled by anthropologists, linguists, and missionaries—and pouring it into grids in his notebooks. For *Language in the Americas* he did this on and off over thirty years—about four years' worth of five-day weeks, he figures. From some 2,000 primary sources he filled twenty-four notebooks (not counting the six devoted to grammatical patterns) with roughly 250,000 words.

A page of a Greenberg notebook has columns headed by basic vocabulary items: "flour," "flow," "flower," "fly," and so forth. Each line corresponds to a language. The result is a welter of words from which Greenberg gleans elements of order. On one two-page spread, among dozens of words for the noun "fly," five stand out before his eyes. Three are from languages in the Algonquian family (which fills one page)—*mesisa*, *musuhq*, and *msusok*. Two are from the Salish family (which fills the other)—*mamis* and *muza*. Hmmm. How many other intriguing resemblances between Algonquian and Salish are to be discerned within the several hundred words he examines?

Greenberg calls his methodology "mass comparison." Other people have other names for it. One linguist calls it "megalocomparison." Eric Hamp calls it "crude and puerile." He elaborates: "I mean, quite frankly, around here, in our classes here, if any of our students did any stuff like that, we wouldn't even tolerate it. You would flunk a person who did that kind of stuff."

Hamp offers two elementary reminders for Greenberg's edification. First, sounds change over time, so that phonetic affinities among languages grow obscure and eventually sink from view, retrievable—if at all—only

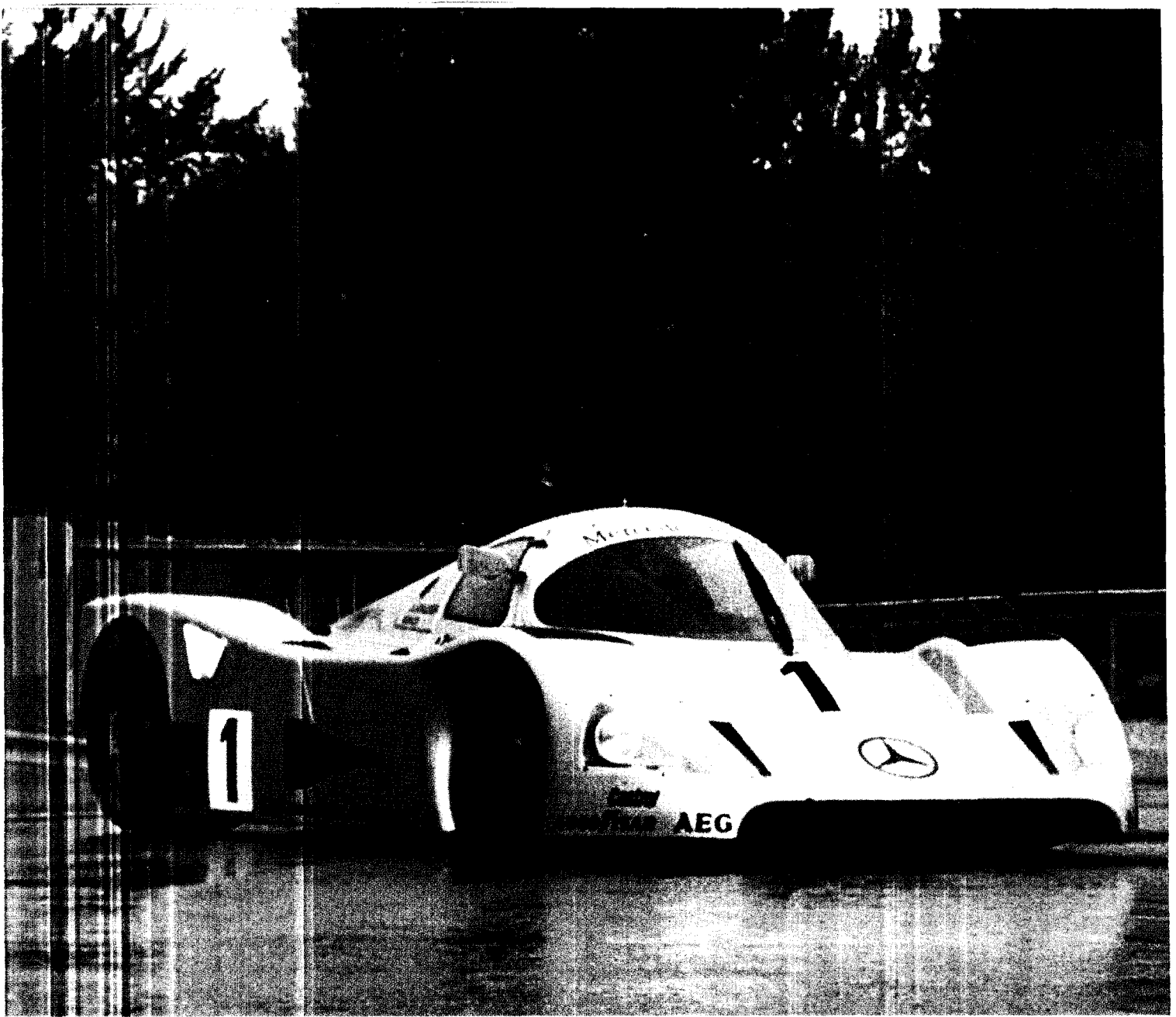
with rules of phonological correspondence. (Recall Hamp's lecture on *trois* and *erek'*.) The result is that an ever growing portion of superficial look-alikes are sheer coincidence. Hamp's second reminder is that words are sometimes borrowed from other languages; without rules of correspondence, it's harder to distinguish borrowings (which often won't comply with those rules) from ancestral commonalities.

These pitfalls have not escaped Greenberg's attention. The borrowing problem, he says, can be minimized through careful word selection. Cultures tend to borrow words for things they don't yet have. Western culture has given Japan the word *erebata* along with the elevator itself, just as Japanese culture filled a linguistic niche with "sushi" by filling a culinary niche with raw fish. But how often is one culture going to introduce the concept of "water" or "head" or "two" to another? ("Three" is a different story; not all languages have carried enumeration that far.)

Sticking with basic words also mitigates one other problem Greenberg faces: shifts in meaning so dramatic that a semantic slot is vacated by one word and filled by another from the same language. In the early 1960s Aharon Dolgopolsky, after studying the histories of 140 languages, ranked vocabulary items in the order of their resistance to replacement. Leading the list was the first-person pronoun, and others in the top fifteen included "you," "two," "tongue," "name," "eye," "tear" (as in "teardrop"), "tooth," "louse," "water," and "dead." Greenberg tries to confine his comparisons to words almost as elemental as these. "You don't look at the word for 'lavender,'" he says.

Even core words are subject to incremental sound change, of course, but Greenberg believes that this problem, too, is manageable. Phonetic drift, though nettlesome, has two saving graces. One is its reluctance to alter certain sounds. The best examples are the nasal consonants *m* and *n*, especially when they begin a word. Their extraordinary stability, Greenberg says, explains how a tendency across Amerind languages for *m* to mark the second-person pronoun and *n* the first-person could be residue from a proto-language more than 10,000 years old.

The second fortunate fact about phonetic drift, as we've seen, is that it tends to confine itself to particular channels. For example: two words beginning with *p* and *t* are unlikely relatives; on the other hand, a shift from *p* to



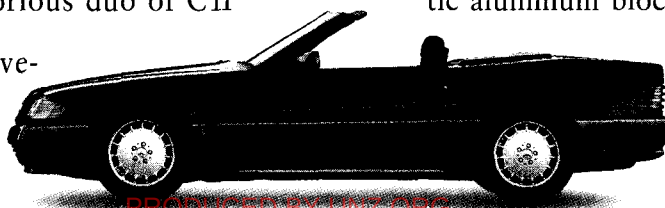
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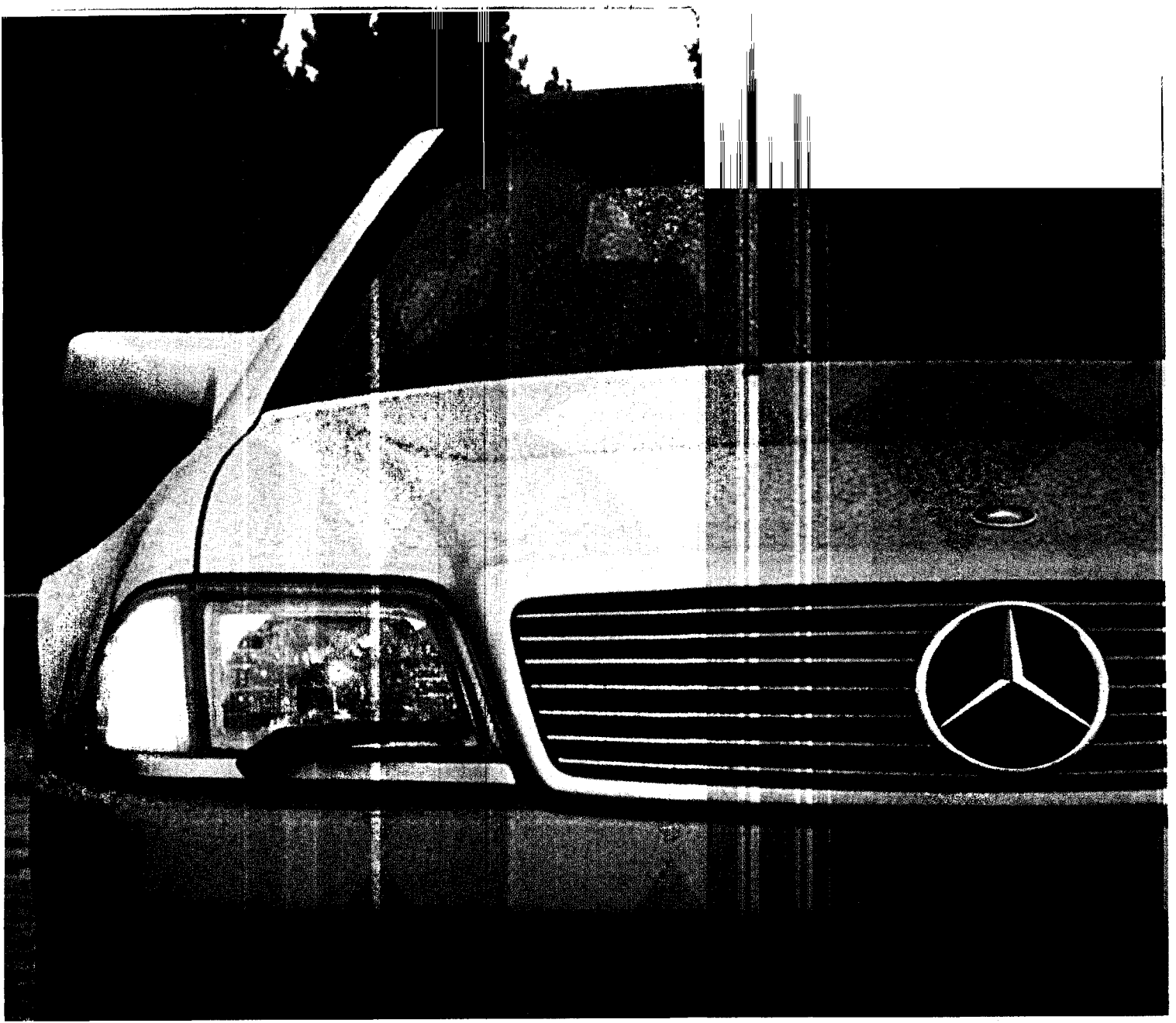
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b, or *b* to *v*, is not uncommon. So when Greenberg sees that “rain” is *bai* in the Penutian language of Maidu, *beia* in the Macro-Ge language of Oti, and *vui* in the Macro-Ge language of Capoxo, and that the verb “to wet” is *puui* in the Macro-Tucanoan languages of Ubde-Nehern and Papury and *poi* in the Macro-Tucanoan language of Mobima, he senses an underlying historical unity among the three families.

In sum, the whole thing isn’t all that complicated. “What I try to show in this book is all you have to do is take the important, stable words and look at them all at the same time, and it stands out in a second.”

Science and Art

GREENBERG’S CRITICS SOMETIMES CALL HIS work unscientific and insist that it fails to “prove” the validity of Amerind. Greenberg considers this choice of terminology a telling sign of confusion. The concept of proof, he notes, doesn’t figure much in science these days. Even in a field as “hard” as physics, people don’t talk of theories as being “proved” and thus enshrined in the Hall of Truths. All we can say with utter certainty about even the most dominant paradigms—quantum physics, the Big Bang—is that they are the simplest and most powerful explanatory frameworks yet found, and haven’t so far met data with which they’re baldly incompatible. As more evidence comes along, paradigms may be overthrown, but until then they’re the best guess going. That, strictly speaking, is all any good theory is: the best guess going.

This view of science is grounded in an epistemological humility that has coalesced in the twentieth century. But it was in the nineteenth century, back when scientists more often talked of “proving” theories, that comparative linguistics, with its elaborate “natural” laws of phonetic change, proudly claimed a place among the sciences. Greenberg’s point, basically, is that if comparative linguistics wants to call itself a modern science, it should start talking like one—talking in terms of stronger or weaker, rather than proved or unproved. He thinks his American Indian classification is strong.

Viewed in this light, Greenberg’s methodology looks *in principle* unassailable: if he can find among American Indian languages patterns too pronounced to be written off as coincidence, there must be some explanation for them; and if they aren’t plausibly explicable as borrowing, then common ancestry would seem to be the explanation that wins. “I really think there’s a weak spot here in American linguistics,” says William Baxter, a comparative linguist at the University of Michigan whose interest in issues of large-scale classification was aroused by Shevoroshkin. “I think the challenge to the old methodology is very legitimate.”

That isn’t to say, Baxter hastens to add, that Greenberg has made the case for Amerind—that he has found pat-

terns unambiguously demanding explanation. This question is hard to settle. Sifting through the 281 Amerind etymologies that constitute a good part of *Language in the Americas*, one is struck by the pretty clusters of *bais* and *vuis* and *puuis*, but one knows that these are a small and select sample of the data, and it is hard to figure out whether, all told, they represent a pattern. Greenberg encourages doubters to go to the source, and examine his notebooks, which reside in the Stanford library. But deciding whether their contents form a structure that spans all twenty-two Amerind volumes is no simple task, at least not for a lay person.

This highlights what Baxter says is a more legitimate gripe about Greenberg: he doesn’t spell out criteria for deciding when two words correspond closely enough to qualify as a match. Greenberg himself may not need such pedantry; his intuitive sense for linguistic affinity is the subject of some renown. But other linguists may. And science is supposed to be a game anyone can play. Greenberg’s critics say his notebooks are just an unusually long Rorschach test: he looks at them and sees what he wants to see, granting himself whatever phonetic (not to mention semantic) latitude turns out to be necessary. (Even the significance of the *n-m* pattern for first- and second-person Amerind pronouns—a fairly simple-sounding thing—Greenberg has not yet demonstrated to everyone’s satisfaction.)

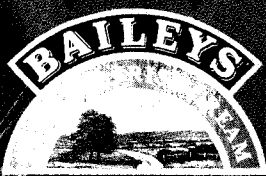
By failing to make his analysis more accessible, Baxter says, Greenberg has allowed everyone to ignore the methodological issues he’s raising. And that’s not the only excuse he’s given them. Many simple mistakes have been found in *Language in the Americas*: words in the wrong language, words with the wrong meaning. Greenberg’s detractors often preface their indictments by denouncing his methodology, but then, rather than elaborate, they almost invariably veer toward their favorite subject: his sloppiness. There seems to be an unofficial contest among them to characterize most powerfully the magnitude of the error. (Campbell may win with his pithy “The bulk of Greenberg’s data is non-data.”)

GREENBERG ADMITS THAT HE MADE MORE THAN A few careless mistakes, and he seems embarrassed by them, but he has not been especially contrite. In fact, his stand on the issue of sloppiness is essentially that it doesn’t matter. The whole point of the mass-comparison methodology, he notes, is its resistance to turbulence: even after millennia of randomization through phonetic and semantic drift, some basic patterns are still visible and therefore significant. So why should the introduction of more noise cast them into doubt? Quite the contrary: if a pattern of transcontinental breadth is still discernible after Greenberg has randomly fuzzed up the data, then its roots must run deep indeed.

The main thing, to Greenberg, is that he painted the big picture. “I could have taken all my notebooks

BAILEYS

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and gone back and checked every single form," he says. "But that would have been a colossal job. It would have taken at least a year." Greenberg is seventy-five years old. He wants to finish a book on his classification of the Eurasian languages and then, if he's feeling ambitious enough, focus on the proto-World question. And he has always been, as he puts it, "slightly impatient."

Greenberg doesn't think he should be seen as so threatening to the way of life of the American Indianists. It's not as if he's calling for a ban on reconstruction or on rules of phonological correspondence. If linguists want to trace the history of languages ever so precisely, if they want to draw vivid inferences about the cultural milieu of a proto-language, fine; these pastimes are not without merit. But they shouldn't pretend that any of this is necessary if the sole aim is a valid classification. Just look at the way Indo-European studies unfolded, Greenberg says: the basic family tree was worked out long before the rules of correspondence and the reconstructions. "At no time when they argued about the regularity of sound change, or the details, did it occur to them that this had anything to do with whether the Indo-European languages were related. It was rather that they took that as the basic assumption on which they were working. Because how can you start comparative linguistics until you know which languages to compare? There has to be the first step. That's kind of obvious."

THAT IS NOT KIND OF OBVIOUS TO ERIC HAMP. ONE can confront him repeatedly with arguments about the nature of modern science, and the old-fashionedness of "proof," but he will finish the day the way he started it: unwilling to countenance the positing of a language family without rules of phonological correspondence. Granted, Hamp says, even the best, most acidly careful linguists can't account for every difference between two related languages by means of rules of correspondence. Still, "no claimed relation really has reached any kind of status worth notice until you have made a fair attempt." And why is that? It's not really clear. Either because Hamp thinks comparative linguistics should abide by unusually exacting standards of evidence (not an indefensible position) or because that's the way it's always been done or both. Sometimes it seems as if Greenberg has violated the rules of some guild.

It is somehow easy to imagine Hamp—this stout, hearty, ruddy-faced man—belonging to a medieval guild. He might produce finely wrought woodwork or glassware or golden rings, but whatever he made, it would be the finest in the land. Nothing so pleases him as precision. He was in charge of revising the etymologies for the latest unabridged Random House dictionary, and he can go on for some time about how many errors he and his legion of consultants sniffed out and fixed. Some of them were dinky errors—an incorrectly underdotted letter, say—that don't affect the overall drift of the etymology. Still,

it's "the difference between truth and falsity, that's all." Which leads Hamp eventually back to Greenberg. "What offends me about what Joe does, you see, is this lack of craftsmanship. It's really making a beautiful product, you know, that's the entrancing thing in all this."

Genetics and Linguistics

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF *LANGUAGE IN THE Americas*, Greenberg has gotten a vote of confidence from within biology. A research team headed by Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, a geneticist at Stanford, completed a global survey of "genetic markers"—variations in proteins and enzymes, for example, that reflect data in a person's DNA. With these markers the researchers sketched a family tree of humankind, depicting the divergence of the world's peoples from a single stock that, they believe, lived in Africa 100,000 years ago. And in the Native American branches of that tree Cavalli-Sforza saw a pattern reminiscent of Greenberg's three-wave scenario for migrations across the Bering Strait.

People who are descended from tribes in Greenberg's Amerind language family, Cavalli-Sforza found, form a fairly homogenous genetic cluster. To be sure, there are discernible subclusters, but they are related to one another closely enough, in his estimation, to have come from a single ancestral stock that lived as recently as 15,000 years ago. Moreover, these Amerind subclusters are markedly more akin to one another than any of them is to the northwestern American cluster, which coincides with Greenberg's Na-Dene language family. And their relation to speakers of the Eskimo-Aleut languages is more distant still. The reflection of the three-migration model, and of Greenberg's three-way language classification, Cavalli-Sforza says, is "so sharp in the genetic data that it's really remarkable." (This claim has not gone unchallenged by Greenberg's critics.)

Cavalli-Sforza sees in his data correspondences to other controversial language phyla as well, including Nostratic. But since these families, in contrast to Amerind, typically come unattached to any particular migrational scenario, the meaning of the parallels is a bit more elusive. It all hinges on how, exactly, biological and linguistic evolution are related; what we make of an overlap between gene pools and controversial language families depends on how much overlap we should expect between gene pools and uncontroversial language families.

The answer is some, at least. Biological and linguistic evolution work the same way: populations get isolated and grow distinct. So as any group of people forges a linguistic identity, a genetic identity may take shape too. This isn't to say that the correspondence of genes and languages will be universal or, very often, precise. Languages can cross genetic borders, as when Spanish and English were imposed on the New World. Genes can cross linguistic borders, as through immigration. And of-

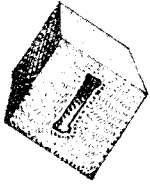


ten the borders get crossed both ways at once: a people absorbs a language as well as its carriers. Consider the Lapps. Linguistically they fall in with Finns, Estonians, and other speakers of Uralic-Yukaghir languages. Genetically, Cavalli-Sforza says, they belong with the Indo-European-speaking peoples of Eurasia. But they don't belong fully; he found traces of other Uralic-speakers in the Lapp gene pool—traces, presumably, of the very Uralic-speakers who at some point gave a new language to the Lapps. Similarly, there are signs of mingled ancestry among present-day Ethiopians, who linguistically fall in with Arabs and Israelis but genetically are grouped with black Africans.

JOSEPH H. GREENBERG

The various kinds of borderline cases help explain why the genetic groups in Cavalli-Sforza's tree don't align perfectly with linguistic groups. Still, the alignment is close enough often enough (in the case of Indo-European, for example) that when the genetic groups line up with linguistic families not yet accepted, these families would seem to have earned some increment of credence.

One of the clearest examples is Austric, a language superfamily so widely doubted that even Greenberg has vacillated over its validity. It embraces four families: Austronesian (comprising languages in Indonesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Malaysia), Daic (covering much of



If we accept the more audacious proposals of people like Greenberg, Shevoroshkin, and Starostin, and place them next to one another, the basic branches of a world language family tree are discernible.

Thailand and southern China), Miao-Yao (found in splatches across southeastern and eastern Asia), and Austroasiatic (which includes Vietnamese).

In the vicinity of the Austric phylum are two other phyla: aboriginal Australian and Indo-Pacific (a still-controversial phylum, posited by Greenberg, which consists mainly of some 700 languages in New Guinea). By around 30,000 B.C., according to Cavalli-Sforza's diagram, the Southeast Asian branch of the human family tree had divided into three limbs that match these three phyla almost perfectly. Only thousands of years later did the Austric limb begin subdividing, eventually yielding nine contemporary ethnic groups, eight of which are Austric-speaking.

Cavalli-Sforza and his collaborators have written that the Nostratic superfamily, like the Austric, shows a striking correspondence with the genetic data, but in fact the evidence here is ambiguous. There is, to be sure, one piece of good news for Nostraticists. The inclusion in the Nostratic family of Northeast Asians, such as Japanese and Koreans, has long seemed strange. Judging by appearances, one would expect these groups to have a closer genetic affinity with the Asians to their south than with the Europeans to their west, yet the closer linguistic affinity, according to the Nostratic thesis, is with the Europeans. Traditionally anthropologists have judged largely by those appearances (though some genetic markers have long been used in a limited way), and labeled Japanese and Koreans "Asiatics" (or "Mongoloids"), along with Southeast Asians. But Cavalli-Sforza places Japanese and Koreans (and Eskimos) closer to Caucasians, making the Nostratic scenario more simply conceivable. Specifically, he places the Northeast Asians and Caucasians—and, indeed, all speakers of Nostratic, with the readily explained exception of Ethiopians—on a "North Eurasian" branch, one of three big branches on the human family tree which had taken shape by around 45,000 years ago. (The other two are Southeast Asian and black African.)

Sounds good. But a close look at the North Eurasian branch complicates things. The branch's first cleavage—occurring at least 30,000 years ago, long before proto-Nostratic is thought to have been spoken—separates ancestors of some Nostratic-speakers (such as speakers of Altaic) from those of others (such as speakers of Indo-European). After that fork, those on the Altaic side are accompanied by ancestors of Native Americans, who don't

split off onto their own limb until many thousands of years later. It seems curious, from a Nostratic point of view, that Altaic-speakers should be more closely related to American Indians than to their fellow Nostratics, the Europeans. This is hardly a fatal complication for the Nostratic thesis, given the way languages can cross genetic borders. But it's a complication. The Nostratic phylum doesn't receive a simple thumbs-up from genetics, as much of the scientific literature and some press reports suggest.

Super-Nostratics

THIS CLOUD ON THE NOSTRATIC HORIZON DOES have a silver lining. Both Greenberg and Shevoroshkin subscribe to the theory (a "super-Nostratic" theory, some call it) that Amerind and Nostratic are sister phyla—that their proto-languages share a parent proto-proto-language. So they should be happy to see all speakers of Amerind languages sitting at the same table with Nostratic-speakers, on the big North Eurasian branch, even if the exact seating arrangement is not ideal.

The North Eurasian branch figures in one other super-Nostratic theory, proposed by Sergei Starostin, who is considered by many the most gifted of the younger Nostraticists. Starostin's hypothesis comes in two parts, and together (if correct) they take us a step closer to the roots (if they exist) of proto-World.

First, Starostin sees a kinship between two non-Nostratic Eurasian language phyla: the North Caucasian family, found north of the Caucasus Mountains, near the Black Sea, and the Sino-Tibetan family, which includes Mandarin Chinese, Tibetan, and other languages of eastern Asia. He is in the process of reconstructing the mother of these phyla, the "proto-Sino-Caucasian" language. Apparently she was no minor proto-language. Starostin finds traces of her offspring across the breadth of southern Eurasia, not only in China and Tibet and near the Caucasus but also in Italy; he believes that Etruscan, a long-dead language traditionally considered an "isolate," was a Sino-Caucasian tongue. (The fact that the islands of Sino-Caucasian are separated by a sea of Indo-European suggests that proto-Sino-Caucasian pre-dates proto-Indo-European, and that some of her daughters were smothered in the Indo-European advance.)

Other linguists see links between proto-Sino-Cauca-

sian and Basque, another supposed isolate. It is intriguing, then, that Cavalli-Sforza found hints of a genetic affinity between Caucasians and Basques. But that isn't the main relevance of his work to Starostin's thinking. This has to do with part two of Starostin's theory—the contention that Sino-Caucasian and Nostratic are sister phyla, sprung from a proto-proto-language spoken more than 15,000 years ago. Starostin has observed that if he is right, and if Greenberg and Shevoroshkin are right about a comparable Amerind-Nostratic kinship, there must have been a single language whose progeny went on to occupy almost all of Eurasia and the New World. Call it proto-SCAN: Sino-Caucasian, Amerind, Nostratic.

It's noteworthy, then, that on Cavalli-Sforza's North Eurasian branch the only people who don't speak an Amerind or Nostratic tongue are Tibetans, whose languages are Sino-Caucasian, and speakers of Na-Dene languages, which some Nostraticists have labeled Sino-Caucasian. (A Sino-Na-Dene affinity also was posited earlier in this century by the American linguist Edward Sapir.) Cavalli-Sforza didn't have enough data to classify confidently two of the other main Sino-Caucasian-speaking groups—North Chinese and North Caucasians—but what evidence he has suggests that they, too, would have been deemed North Eurasians. If we ignore the inconvenient but not insurmountable fact that the one remaining Sino-Caucasian group, the South Chinese, is not on the North Eurasian branch, then that branch corresponds—fairly precisely, if very tentatively—to the SCAN family. (Actually, you might make that SCAAN. Starostin and Greenberg believe that proto-Afro-Asiatic was a sister of proto-Nostratic, not a daughter. And this revision is a good example, Greenberg believes, of what's wrong with mainstream methodology; if Illich-Svitych and Dolgopolsky had first gotten the big picture through mass comparison, they would have had a clearer idea of which language families to compare fastidiously.)

AT THIS POINT, OF COURSE, WE ARE WELL BEYOND the bounds of orthodoxy. Eric Hamp considers Sino-Caucasian “a hell of a big stretch,” and when he hears talk of connecting Sino-Caucasian with other families, he starts saying unflattering things about Starostin. Mentioning Austric isn't a good way to begin a friendly chat with Hamp either. Still, as long as we've gone this far, we may as well recap the journey: If we accept the more audacious proposals of people like Greenberg, Shevoroshkin, and Starostin, and place them next to one another, the basic branches of a world language family tree are discernible. In the southeastern part of the world are the Austric superfamily and the Indo-Pacific and Australian families. In Eurasia and the New World are the Nostratic, Sino-Caucasian (with Na-Dene speculatively included), and Amerind superfamilies—all of which, hyper-hypothetically, form a single megabranche. In sub-Saharan Africa there are Niger-

Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan (which some people want to fuse into a single Congo-Saharan phylum) and, at the southern tip of the continent, the Khoisan family—the strange-sounding “click” languages of the Bushmen.

This list amounts at most to nine language phyla. If one buys all the merger proposals, it amounts to only six: Indo-Pacific, Australian, Congo-Saharan, Khoisan, the Austric superfamily, and the SCAN super-superfamily. Either way, there is a sharp contrast with the estimates by mainstream linguists of anywhere from fifty to several hundred legitimate language families in the world.

The number of theories about exactly how the six to nine branches would come together to form a tree is roughly equal to the number of proto-World enthusiasts. There is slightly more agreement on where the tree's roots would lie. In the vicinity of Kenya and Tanzania, east of Lake Victoria, is a small region within close range of languages from all four of Africa's families. It is near the southeasternmost reach of Afro-Asiatic (with its posited links to the Eurasian languages) and right at a boundary between Niger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan. And, though the Khoisan languages are concentrated in a big patch far to the south, two small islands of Khoisan sit nearby. They seem to have been cut adrift as speakers of Niger-Kordofanian, who for millennia have been farmers, advanced eastward, erasing large patches of Khoisan, whose speakers were hunter-gatherers.

This nominee for proto-World homeland falls within the broad zone—extending from tip to toe of eastern Africa—that most physical anthropologists suspect contains the common human homeland, the place from which our species set out onto the various migratory paths that yielded the great modern diversity of races and cultures. So, in geographic terms, the proto-World thesis harmonizes well enough with the fossil evidence of human prehistory. As for *when* our distant ancestors fanned out across the globe, the harmony is a bit less close. Here again, though, the study of human genes has lately brought good news to proto-Worlders.

TWO SEPARATE QUESTIONS OFTEN GET CONFLATED in the proto-World debate. One is whether all known languages derive from a single ancestral tongue—the proto-World question proper. The other is “monogenesis of language”—whether human language arose only once on this planet. Contrary to common intuition, the proto-World scenario doesn't depend on monogenesis. Even if human language arose at, say, three different times and places, one of these tongues (or its progeny) could have vanquished the other two (or their progeny), thus securing the title of proto-World. Though this needn't have meant vanquishing the speakers of those languages, it could have. (The Neanderthals, for example, whose demise our ancestors likely abetted, may have had language.)

But if the proto-World thesis wouldn't be devastated by the multiple origin of language, it would certainly be weakened. The world is a big place, and it's hard to imagine speakers of one language family wandering into every neighborhood inhabited by speakers of a competing tongue and converting or killing them. So the best hope for proto-Worlders is that our ancestors began to trickle out of the common human homeland only after the birth of complex language.

Of course, no one knows when complex language was born—nor is there a consensus on what constitutes “complex.” (Surely a language of *some* complexity—compared with ape language, at least—had appeared by the time our early ancestors began to disperse.) But here is a good rule of thumb: the more recently the first branches sprouted off the common human stock—the more recently, in other words, the last group of hominids ancestral to all modern people lived—the more likely monogenesis of human language and thus the more palatable the proto-World thesis.

As recently as 1986 one could argue without fear of clear-cut contradiction that this happened a very long time ago. According to this line of thought, the half-million-year-old fossils of Peking Man and Java Man represent not evolutionary dead ends but rather the direct ancestors of, respectively, modern Chinese and aboriginal Australians. This was the hotly debated thesis of Carleton Coon's 1962 book *The Origin of Races*—hotly debated in part because it seemed to provide a vehicle for racism. Half a million years struck people as a long time, perhaps long enough for important genetically based differences among the races (in intelligence, say) to evolve.

Coon's thesis has lately become less tenable. It is now

possible to estimate how recently the ancestral human stock was still intact by comparing genetic information in peoples around the world. The study of “mitochondrial” DNA—in the widely publicized search for “Eve, mother of all humankind”—has yielded an estimate of 200,000 years ago. And that's a rough figure. Some biologists, Cavalli-Sforza among them, put the number at 100,000 years, the age of the oldest fossil remains of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* (which are also the oldest such remains found outside the presumed African homeland, in a cave in Israel). These kinds of numbers look very good to proto-Worlders.

The support that the various kinds of genetic evidence give to the Shevoroshkins and Greenbergs of the world shouldn't be overstated. For one thing, the “Eve” dating is not undisputed. And, as we've seen, the meaning of Cavalli-Sforza's data is less simple than it at first seems. Still, it's probably true that, on balance, the new data from biology do more to help than to hurt the sorts of controversial claims about the history of language favored by scholars like Greenberg and Shevoroshkin. More to the point: one of the firmer endorsements is for Greenberg's Amerind theory. And that theory rests on the methodology of mass comparison, the methodology now being brought to bear on the proto-World question.

Global Etymologies

LAST SPRING *THE SCIENCES*, A BIMONTHLY PUBLISHED by the New York Academy of Sciences, carried an article by Shevoroshkin called “The Mother Tongue,” and subtitled “How Linguists Have Reconstructed the Ancestor of All Living Languages.” The article has not further endeared Shevo-

THE SACRAMENTO STREET WASH-N-DRY

Across the dark street, I'm pulled
To the window of the Sacramento Street

Wash-n-Dry, where under buzzing fluorescence
The glossy, blue-wrapped laundry shines.

The sheen could come from bones of saints
Brought out and washed in wine for holy days,

But it's only sheets, towels, shirts,
And socks, folded warm from the dryer,

Stacked in slick bundles. As though
This afternoon the Chinese grandmother

Wrapped slabs of moon, the incandescent
Laundry glows. I am drawn surely,

Like a pilgrim to the outline
Of Mont St. Michel at full moon,

Or the tourist to the powerful sky-blue hole
In the Pantheon, like the four dusky

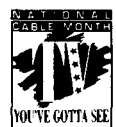
Moths pulsing their wings against the glass,
And I wonder, could this be paradise?

—Frances Mayes

8 pm. Their finest hour.



BIOGRAPHY. Tuesdays 8pm ET



roshkin to his fellow Nostraticists. "I think that he did rather a lot of damage among the more conservative linguistic circles," Starostin says. Scanning the article, and seizing on one of its bolder claims to knowledge about proto-World, Starostin grows briefly and uncharacteristically perturbed. "That's terrible," he says. "Absolutely."

Shevoroshkin admits that the article's subtitle is misleading. He says the editors didn't clear it with him. He would have preferred something more consistent with his assertion in the article that a group of scholars "believe they have *partially* reconstructed human language as it was first uttered nearly 100,000 years ago" (emphasis added). Yes, that would have been nice. And perhaps there could have been some mention of the fact that "reconstructed" is a stronger word than these scholars would themselves use. And also maybe a hint that these scholars don't have, well, jobs at universities.

There are two concerted research projects under way to produce proto-World "reconstructions." One is being undertaken by a Czech named Vaclav Blazek, a high school teacher and self-taught linguist who has earned the respect of Starostin and other Moscow linguists with his grasp of languages around the world. (The Nostraticists, who, like Blazek, grew up in a country that often impeded academic talent, aren't surprised to find a cutting-edge scholar teaching high school math.) The other proto-World research effort is being conducted by an American named Merritt Ruhlen. Ruhlen got a Ph.D. in linguistics at Stanford in 1973 and later became one of the world's few free-lance comparative linguists. He survives by doing editorial work for Greenberg, by taking care of his twins while his wife works, and by collecting book royalties; his *Guide to the World's Languages* is easily the most useful and accessible book of its kind.

Ruhlen's admiration for Joseph Greenberg knows no readily detected bounds. He marvels at Greenberg's linguistic intuition and his capacious mind, and he is proud to call himself a member of the "Greenbergian school," which appears to have two full-time members, counting Greenberg. Ruhlen is relieved that no reviewer has yet called his book "The World According to Greenberg," for its sympathetic treatment of Greenberg's American Indian and other classifications.

Ruhlen's quest for proto-World can be traced to a 1976 lecture at which Greenberg said that in languages around the world he had seen words sounding something like "*tik*" for "one," or for "pointing finger" or just "finger." For example, Greenberg considers the Latin *digit* a vaguely recognizable descendant of some such proto-World root. Greenberg also suggested a few other global cognates. "That was the first time I had ever heard any respectable linguist mention that there might be words shared by these families," Ruhlen says. "Right away that got my attention."

Greenberg hasn't had time to pursue this line of thought very far. He does still get tempted occasionally

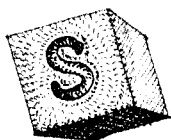
to take what, after he completes his classification of "Eurasianic" languages (in a book tentatively titled *Indo-European and Its Closest Relatives*), would be the next logical step in his career: having classified languages native to about 90 percent of the earth's land mass, just "sort of finish up the whole world"—do the definitive classification of languages, constructing a global family tree that would lead back to the origin. On the other hand, "it's such a big job," and "the fact is, I have a finite intelligence." Besides, he hasn't been getting a lot of positive reinforcement for his work lately. Even mustering the resolve to finish the Eurasianic book is at times hard, because "they're all going to dump on it anyway, even though it'll be right."

That leaves it for Ruhlen to flesh out Greenberg's suspicion that if you work at it, you can find the remnants of perhaps fifty basic proto-World roots. In collaboration with John Bengtson, another unaffiliated linguist, Ruhlen has begun compiling "global etymologies." These are lists of what seem to be widespread cognates, some of which have been speculatively noted by Greenberg, Illich-Svitych, Dolgopolsky, and the Italian linguist Alfredo Trombetti, who was a prominent proto-World enthusiast in the early 1900s. ("They practically ran him out of the linguistics community," Greenberg says of Trombetti.) Blazek, meanwhile, is doing roughly the same thing back in Czechoslovakia—though somewhat more carefully, Shevoroshkin says, by way of complaining about the general inferiority of American comparative linguists.

THE HYPOTHETICAL VESTIGES OF PROTO-WORLD ARE too fragmentary to permit reconstruction in the traditional sense; the "reconstructed" roots are fairly wild guesses, made for the sake of having a convenient label. (Ruhlen doesn't even place an asterisk, the universal sign of a reconstruction, before his roots, but Blazek does; we will follow Blazek's convention for the sake of consistency.) Ruhlen has posited thirty-one roots, such as **pal* for "two," **aja* for "mother or older female relative," **bur* for "ashes or dust," and **ku* or **kun* for "who?" Blazek's list includes **tali* for "tongue" and **gini* or **nigi* for "tooth." Several proposed roots can be seen in modern English, such as Ruhlen's **mano* for "man" or "person" and **mena* (as in "mental") for "to think."

Virtually none of these roots is reflected in all language families. Blazek, who divides the world into eight families, insists that each root be attested in three, though eleven of his twelve roots are found in at least four, and one—the one for "tongue," fittingly enough—is in all eight. Some of Ruhlen's roots are attested in only six of thirty-two families. (Why thirty-two? Ruhlen stuck with relatively conventional families to protect his flank against mainstream linguists.)

The basic criticisms of global etymologies should by now be easy to anticipate. First, there is the time-depth



tarostin's advice is to forget about proto-World.

The object of the game, he believes, should simply be to keep classifying the world's languages, and see how far back in time their lines keep converging.

problem. Wouldn't words from 100,000 years ago have either died or utterly metamorphosed by now? In general, yes, proto-Worlders admit; but there must be a few lucky remnants, and if one scans the world's languages with a sufficiently discerning eye, they will stand out. This is a Greenbergian answer, and it raises a question familiar to Greenbergians: What's the difference between discernment and hallucination? How do you know when you're giving yourself too much phonetic and semantic leeway in searching for look-alikes?

Consider Ruhlen's etymology for **tik*, or "one." Although the root is said to survive in twenty of thirty-two language families, the examples include not only such near approximations as *dik* for "one" in the Nilo-Saharan language of Fur and *tik* for "index finger" in Kuskokwim, an Eskimo language, but also *tong* for "arm" in Kede (spoken in the Andaman Islands). Given this sort of wiggle room and 5,000 languages to choose from, how remarkable is it that Ruhlen can provide dozens of examples per proto-World root?

Ruhlen insists that he is holding himself to high standards. To begin with, he tries not to rely on only one language per family. Within Nilo-Saharan is not only the Fur *dik* for "one" but also the Dinka *tok*. (In all, there are more than a hundred **tik* examples among the twenty families.) And Ruhlen uses reconstructed proto-words to represent whole families when possible, as with the proto-Indo-European **deik* (to show or point), the proto-Afro-Asiatic **tak* (one), and the proto-Austroasiatic **(k-)tig* (arm or hand). But reliable proto-words are in short supply, largely because so much of the energy of Western linguists has been invested in their own family, Indo-European.

There is one general defense of Greenbergian mass comparison that isn't available for Ruhlen's use. When Greenberg is asked how he knows that what he sees in Amerind is something more than noise imaginatively perceived, he says he uses other languages as references; however faint the patterns connecting diverse Amerind languages, you have to concede their significance if he can show that they're stronger than patterns among non-Amerind languages. Of course, as we've seen, he seldom gets around to actually showing that in any rigorous way. Still, it's possible in principle. For Ruhlen, though, no such "external controls" are available. If the proto-World family is valid, there are no languages outside it—at least not on this planet.

But Ruhlen has figured out another way to distinguish signal from noise. He lays down the "*pal-tik* challenge." If, indeed, as critics charge, his etymologies for "one" and "two"—**tik* and **pal*—have been superimposed on an essentially random array of words, then those critics should be able to produce an equally plausible argument that **tik* meant "two," not "one," and that **pal* meant "one."

The last time I checked, Eric Hamp wasn't planning to spend a sabbatical scanning the world's languages in hopes of meeting the *pal-tik* challenge. And neither is anyone else. Traditionalists aren't going to pay much attention to this whole global-etymology business until it begins to look a little more traditional.

Even Sergei Starostin, no shrinking violet when it comes to large-scale classification, finds global etymologies problematic. Take, for example, Ruhlen's **kano*, for "arm." Starostin says, "There's a lot of look-alikes in this material, words like *kan* meaning 'arm' in different families. But . . ." He peruses the page. "For example, I may be rather sure that the Caucasian *guina* is related to Yeniseian *ken*, because it's an absolutely regular correspondence, and I can adduce many more examples. But whether the proto-Thai **xeen* or Vietnamese *cánh* may be related to these forms, I'm absolutely not sure. First of all, the Vietnamese *cánh* obviously goes back to some form like *kung* or *king* with a front vowel and with a velar nasal." Obviously. But the question is, "How does it correspond to proto-Thai **xeen*? I do not know, because we don't have any system of correspondences. It may be quite an accidental look-alike." Granted, Starostin says, "this resemblance in a lot of linguistic families probably cannot be accidental. But it won't satisfy any of the serious linguists, because the first thing that everybody demands is correspondences."

Starostin sees brighter prospects fifteen or twenty-five years down the road, when the world's biggest language families, he hopes, will have well-built proto-languages. Then linguists will be able to take a few hundred core vocabulary items and look at them in these eight or ten super-proto-languages. It will be a much cleaner exercise, with a narrower role for subjective interpretation. It will also shorten the leap from known to unknown by 10,000 or 20,000 years. And maybe it will uncover some semi-reliable rules of correspondence connecting the super-proto-languages to one another. But until that day Greenbergian mass comparison will be the only practical

approach to proto-World. And right now, at least, that doesn't seem to be a good way to win friends and influence people in comparative linguistics.

Starostin's advice is to forget about proto-World. For now the issue is serving mainly to confuse people about what Nostratics is and isn't. The object of the game should simply be to keep classifying the world's languages, and see how far back in time their lines keep converging. If in the end there is a single family tree, well then, fine. "If not, well, we won't cry about it."

Shevoroshkin agrees that confusion between the proto-World and Nostratic theories is a problem. But hasn't he himself—perhaps, um, inadvertently—encouraged the confusion by talking so much about proto-World? "No. It is the other way around. Because I always try to show what is Nostratic, what is Sino-Caucasian, and how you go further to the Mother Tongue. I am trying to show this. There are confusions, sometimes, but I am trying not to confuse—I am trying to put dots on the *i* exactly."

Lumpers and Splitters

AT THE RISK OF OVERSIMPLIFYING THIS WHOLE multidimensional, multifaceted controversy over Nostratic and Amerind and Sino-Caucasian and proto-World and the proper breadth of language classification generally: There are two kinds of people. In different fields they go by different names. In comparative linguistics they are known as the lumpers and the splitters. The lumpers like to put many languages into few families. The splitters like to inspect the resulting lumps and find fault lines.

In a way, the difference between lumpers and splitters is one of risk aversion—or, more precisely, one of what sorts of risk a person is averse to. Greenberg is willing to make a mistake or two—or two dozen, or ten dozen—in his quest for the big picture. He is unafraid of simple error. What he may be afraid of is reaching the end of his life without having seen all the big pictures there are to see. For Eric Hamp, the greater fear is to be utterly wrong about something.

I once asked Hamp to venture a guess as to whether there had been a single mother tongue, ancestral to all modern languages. If he had to bet on it, I said, which way would he bet? "I would consider it such ridiculous folly to answer that question, I would be embarrassed," he said. I raised the stakes. Okay, I said, suppose an intellectually inclined terrorist put a gun to his head and demanded that he venture a guess. "If he said that to me, of course, I would have to say, right away, 'You're an ass.'" So he would rather die than guess? "Well, as a scholar, of course, you'd have to. I mean a decent scholar is never going to guess around at something that they know they have no rules to guide them by."

The splitters and lumpers are the yin and yang of science. The lumpers come up with grand, unifying theories that purport to encompass just about everything, and the splitters, as often as not, succeed in finding some unseen flaw. Then the process begins anew: (a) Bold claim. (b) Nitpicky critique. (c) Progress—if only in the sense of having a clearer idea of what the truth isn't. Eventually, if all goes well, someone comes up with a theory that survives all assaults and winds up winning the assent of just about everyone. That's how human inquiry asymptotically approaches a good working description of reality. Of course, in comparative linguistics right now, the great dialectic of science is not exactly in full swing; the lumpers and splitters are barely even talking to one another, much less benefiting from the discussion. But these things always take time.

There is a difference in the kinds of pleasure that lumpers and splitters tend to get out of their work. The splitters enjoy the ample but readily contained delight of an accountant who gets all the numbers to add up or a gardener whose rows are precisely in line. It may be bliss, but it isn't ecstasy. The lumpers, on the other hand, when their lumping has gone well, may feel nearly unbounded exhilaration. They aren't gardeners admiring their handiwork but mountain climbers suddenly surveying vast and awesome terrain. (Indeed, some splitters would say, lumpers are subject to sensations that are downright intoxicating.)

In Moscow in the 1960s, when Illich-Svitych was reconstructing proto-Nostratic, there was a sense of rapturous discovery the likes of which, perhaps, hadn't been felt in comparative linguistics since the nineteenth-century definition of Indo-European in all its splendor. Indeed, just as August Schleicher had, in a moment of euphoria, translated a fable into proto-Indo-European, Illich-Svitych, undeterred by the subsequent fate of that fable, composed a poem in proto-Nostratic.

*KelHä wete-i saḱu-n kūhla
ḱada-i palhΛ-ḱΛ na wetä
ša da ʔa-ḱΛ ʔeja ʔälä
ja-ḱo pele ṭuba wete*

Needless to say, a poem in any proto-language, translated into one of its descendants after ten or fifteen millennia have passed, will no longer rhyme. But this one retains such resonance that it was inscribed on Illich-Svitych's tombstone. In English it reads:

Language is a ford across the river of Time,
It leads us to the dwelling place of those who are gone;
But he will not be able to come to this place
Who fears deep water.

And Eric Hamp might add: He will not be able to come to this place who isn't accompanied by some cautious soul insisting that they tread carefully. □

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Despite its seeming indestructibility, concrete is susceptible to the elements and to a variety of peculiarly modern punishments. This, along with scarce funding for maintenance, has resulted in a literally crumbling infrastructure that will take \$1 trillion to repair

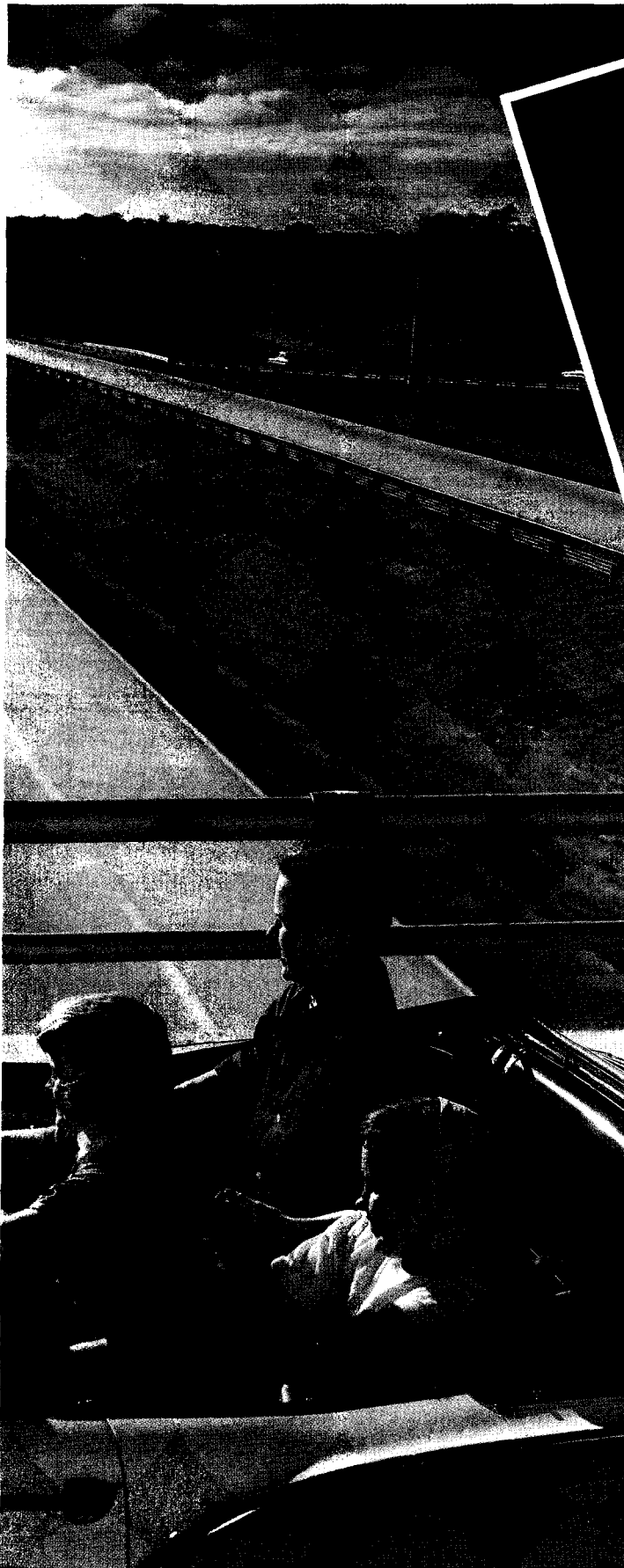
STRONG BUT SENSITIVE

BY JOHN SEDGWICK

EVER SINCE THE VICTORIANS COMPLAINED, more than a century ago, about concrete's artificiality—or, to use John Ruskin's phrase, its "surface deceits"—most right-thinking people have disdained the stuff for one reason or another. But concrete has always maintained an impressive aura of indestructibility. This stems partly from its rock-hard solidity; partly from the survival of the Pantheon and the Coliseum, both built of concrete by the Romans; and partly from the promotions of concrete producers, who have long used "Concrete for Permanence" as an industry slogan. Now, however, as the nation surveys the wreckage of its infrastructure—its pitted highways, collapsing bridges, and leaky water mains—it is learning that concrete does not last forever, at least not the concrete that is currently in place in the United States.

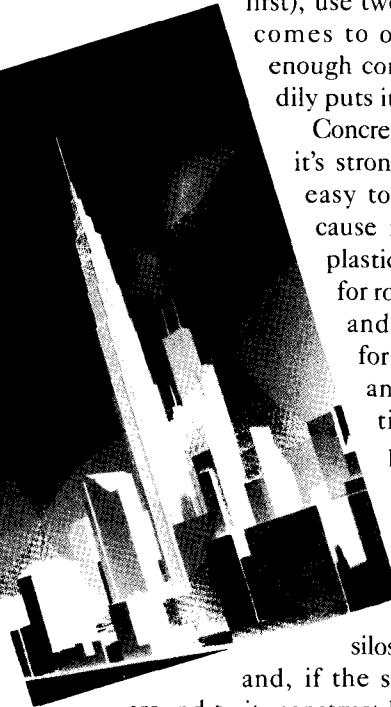
The story of our crumbling infrastructure is in many ways the story of our crumbling concrete, for the infrastructure, along with practically everything else in the civilized world, is made up largely of the "artificial stone," as it was known in Ruskin's day. Concrete is second only to water as the world's most heavily consumed substance. Slightly more than a ton of concrete is produced every year for each human being on the planet, some six billion tons a year altogether. Americans, who rank tenth in the world in concrete consumption (the Swiss are





first), use two tons per person, which comes to one cubic yard each—enough concrete, as one analyst tidily puts it, to “bury everyone in.”

Concrete is everywhere because it's strong, cheap, plentiful, and easy to make, but mostly because it's so versatile. It's like plastic. It can replace asphalt for roads and sidewalks, wood and brick for houses, steel for bridges and high-rises, and PVC (hardened plastic) for water and sewer pipes; and it does certain things that no other material can do nearly as well, such as dam waterways, line canals, shield missile



silos, entomb nuclear wastes, and, if the space program ever gets around to it, construct lunar bases. Unlike plastic, concrete is virtually an all-natural product—an amalgam of sand, gravel, crushed stone, and other aggregates, held together by water and cement, which is itself a fine powder of limestone and clay. Cement, then, is the bonding agent in concrete; it is not, as is popularly thought, the same as concrete. (Thus there are no “cement sidewalks” or “cement buildings,” only concrete ones.) Concrete hardens on its own not by “drying,” as many people imagine, but by a chemical process called hydration, in which the cement and water combine into calcium and silicate hydrates; the hydrates act like a combination of Velcro and Super Glue. The long, bladelike petals of the hydrates, which under an electron microscope look like sea anemones, reach out to bind the concrete package with what amounts to electrostatic cling. The hydrates continue to grow, increasing the concrete's strength virtually forever.

The finished product is waterproof and soundproof (no small thing for apartment-dwellers), it neither rots nor rusts, and it can be molded into any shape. Because of the nature of the chemical bond, concrete combines high compressive strength with low tensile strength, which is to say that it is hard to crush but easy to pull apart. Builders compensate for concrete's tensile deficiency by embedding in it steel reinforcing bars, which have precisely the opposite characteristics.

Concrete is getting better. In the past ten years chemical and mineral additives have been developed to in-

A century's progress: the 1903 Ingall's Building, in Cincinnati, the first reinforced-concrete skyscraper (far left), and the proposed 125-story Miglin-Beitler Tower, in Chicago (above), to be the world's tallest; left, cruising by the new interstate, in the late fifties.



The country's romance with highways, shown by a 1959 ribbon-cutting ceremony in Eau Claire (left) and a 1955 advertisement (right); the site of the first concrete street in America (above) is about to celebrate its hundredth anniversary.

crease concrete's already formidable compressive strength from 5,000 to 19,000 pounds per square inch, and 40,000 pounds per square inch has been achieved in the laboratory. With these new materials, concrete is now making its way into new territory, such as automobile brake linings, the backing for computer chips, and even, with lightweight aggregates, indoor furniture. Reinforced concrete has finally been able to obviate steel I-beams in skyscrapers, in part because its stiffness reduces nausea-inducing sway. The world's fifth tallest building, at 311 South Wacker Drive in Chicago, is built entirely of reinforced concrete, without the conventional skeleton of I-beams, and plans call for the world's tallest building, the slender 125-story Miglin-Beitler Tower, in Chicago, to use nothing but reinforced concrete for its vertical support.

Francis Young, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Illinois, believes that such dramatic improvements show that concrete is finally coming into its own. "Concrete is where metals were in 1960, when their strength shot up five or ten fold, and where ceramics were in 1970, when they did the same thing," he says. "Concrete will go through an explosion of understanding in the 1990s. It's a material for the twenty-first century."

The Literally Crumbling Infrastructure

BUT PERHAPS NOT FOR THE TWENTIETH, IF ITS performance in the nation's public works is any indication. By weight, concrete constitutes one half to two thirds of the roads, bridges, buildings, airports, sewers, canals, dams, subways, and other essential structures that collectively make up the nation's now shaky infrastructure. The statistics of disrepair are disheartening. Sixty percent of the nation's highways need work, ranging from repaving to major structural rehabilitation. More than 40 percent of all highway bridges—some 238,000 of them—are either structurally

deficient or functionally obsolete. In New York City (everyone's Exhibit A when it comes to infrastructural decay) engineers recently listed 355 hazardous conditions on four East River bridges alone. In Massachusetts, after a motorist's car on a road under the heavily traveled Route 1 was struck by a falling chunk of concrete, the Department of Public Works took to stringing nets under decayed overpasses to catch the concrete as it shears off. In one recent two-year period thirty-four cities suffered an average of 229 water-main breaks for every 1,000 miles of pipe. Leaks now cause some large cities to lose as much as 30 percent of their daily water supply.

The Associated General Contractors of America estimates that the necessary repairs and improvements to the infrastructure will cost \$3.3 trillion over a nineteen-year period—a debt that has come to be called the "third deficit," after the federal budget deficit and the international trade deficit. In some respects this third deficit is more alarming than the other two, because it increases exponentially the longer it is ignored and because its very existence cripples the nation's ability to reduce any of the three. David Aschauer, a professor at Bates College who specializes in infrastructural economics, argues that there is "a strong and robust link" between infrastructure investment and productivity. It is not hard to see why this might be so: according to a study by the Highway Users Federation, Los Angeles traffic congestion alone cost businesses and commuters \$500 million in lost time in 1988. In a recent twenty-year period, Aschauer notes, the United States invested a scant 0.3 percent of its national output in infrastructure, and its annual growth in productivity was a dismal 0.6 percent. In contrast, the British invested 1.8 percent and saw their productivity increase by 1.8 percent. The French spent 2.0 percent and saw a productivity return of 2.3 percent. And the Japanese put 5.1 percent into their infrastructure and became 3.0 percent more productive.

While all building materials are implicated in the general infrastructural decay, concrete is implicated most heavily, simply because it has been most heavily used. Surendra Shah, a professor of civil engineering at Northwestern University and the director of the National Science Foundation's Center for Advanced Cement-Based Materials, which has its headquarters at Northwestern, believes that more than \$1 trillion of the \$3.3 trillion infrastructural deficit is needed for repairing the nation's concrete.

How could so much concrete have deteriorated so badly? In appraising concrete's performance, one cannot look just at the concrete. "Durability is not a property of a material itself but a result of the material's interaction with its environment," says Geoffrey Frohnsdorff, the chief of the building-materials division of the Building and Fire Research Laboratory at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. "Concrete may survive millions of years in a benign environment, but less than

a year in a very severe one." Frohnsdorff means the environment in the strict sense of physical surroundings, but the statement is no less true in the larger sense, as a host of political, industrial, economic, and even aesthetic factors have conspired to make the country's concrete environment anything but benign.

Still, concrete itself cannot entirely escape blame. Despite its monolithic appearance, it is by nature far from impervious. Practically as soon as it hardens, concrete shrinks and starts to crack as excess water evaporates. Ordinarily the best that contractors can do to control the cracking is to groove or cut the concrete at regular intervals so as to channel the cracks into an acceptable pattern. Further, concrete's interior space is riddled with tiny pores left behind after the water bonds with the cement.

On the highway the cracks are worsened by the punishing loads, chiefly in the form of monstrous eighteen-wheel trucks, that now far exceed the capacity planned for the interstate highway system during the Eisenhower years. Freeze-thaw cycles in the nation's frost belt make matters worse. Water drains down into the cracks to reach the concrete's internal pores, where, like milk freezing in a bottle, it can burst the concrete apart as it solidifies. Sulfates from the soil can also penetrate the pore structure and cause damage. And the current reliance on de-icing salts (the general solution to road ice was once to slow down) has had such a brutal effect that one might think they were designed specifically to destroy our roadways. Once the concrete has suffered the effects of a few freezes, the salts bleed down to the steel reinforcing bars, where the combination of salt and steel creates an electrochemical reaction akin to that in an electric battery, causing severe rusting at one electrical pole. As the rust expands, it pops out chunks of the surrounding concrete, further exposing the steel bars to salt corrosion. This has been devastating for bridges and parking garages across the north, where they are bathed in salt and exposed to freezing temperatures from all sides.

Underground concrete has been subjected to surprise chemical attacks as well. One of the many problems facing the country's concrete sew-



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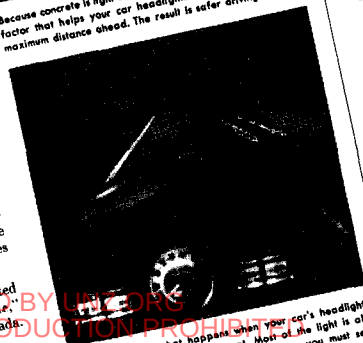
Good visibility is only one reason concrete roads are safer. You can stop quicker too because the gritty, skid-resistant surface grips tires tighter.

Accident records correlated with the type of pavement are proof that concrete roads are much safer. For example, an analysis of accidents due to road conditions on nine federal routes in Georgia for two billion miles of travel in 1952 showed that for equal traffic there were 3.49 times more property damage and 4.62 times more deaths and 3.34 times more damage on dark pavements than on concrete. The pavement can be the difference between life and death!

The money that pays for roads comes from your gas taxes, license fees and tolls. When this money is invested in concrete you get the most economical as well as the safest highways. Concrete usually costs less to build than other pavements designed for the same traffic. It costs far less to maintain and lasts at least twice as long. Low first cost + low maintenance cost + long life = low annual cost.

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ers, for example, stems unexpectedly from federal water-pollution legislation of the early 1970s, which sensibly forbade the continued flushing of heavy metals like chrome, iron, and zinc into the sewer system. But those metals had had the beneficial side effect of poisoning certain sewage bacteria that convert waste sulfides into sulfuric acid, which is extremely corrosive. Without the metals to hold the bacteria in check, the acid has come out in force and begun dissolving the concrete sewer pipes—"just like Alka-Seltzer in water," according to Dan Glasgow, a sewer engineer with the Los Angeles County Sanitation District, where the problem was first addressed. After evaluating the damage with remote-controlled TV cameras and by dispatching sewer workers in scuba gear into the sewers during periods of "low flow," the county has "slip-lined" thousands of miles of corroded sewer pipes with acid-proof plastic pipes to protect the sewers from further assault. Glasgow estimates

setting too quickly. Water is essential for hardening, but too much water can drastically sap the concrete's strength, leaving behind an abundance of the cracks and pores that expose the material to chemical penetration. Yet extra water makes the concrete more fluid and workable, and is thus a constant temptation at the work site. Also, concrete has to be carefully tamped down to make sure that it fills the forms that shape it and fully covers the steel reinforcement bars inside. Little wonder that when Robert Byrne, the author of the disaster novel *Sky-scraper*, needed a likely reason for his New York City skyscraper to collapse, his engineering consultant, Charlie Thornton, advised him to choose weak concrete.

Real-life calamities have happened for a variety of reasons, some of them amazingly stupid. In Boston a concrete building collapsed during construction one winter because workmen thought that the concrete had hardened when it had actually frozen. In Chicago a floor gave



The ravages of time: in 1951, an inspector in Naperville, Illinois, noted the durability of different cements (below). Steel beams reinforce a bridge in Brooklyn (left), where repair funds have been cut.



that 800,000 miles of sewer pipe are affected nationally, at a potential repair cost of many billions of dollars.

In evaluating the nation's concrete, one also has to take into account the way it was laid down, which often was not very well. Whereas most other building materials are fabricated under controlled conditions in a factory, wet concrete is shaped at the construction site by common laborers. Among the lowest-paid of all construction personnel, they have little if any training in concrete placement, and they are under substantial pressure to work quickly. The supervising contractors, who have not had much more formal training in concrete manufacture than their workmen, are sometimes all too willing to trade quality for speed.

Although concrete mixing is a relatively simple process, a few critical variables can make all the difference. One is temperature. On cold days the mixture requires the addition of enhancers to speed up the hardening process; on hot days it requires retardants to keep it from

way after a contractor decided to economize by using thicker reinforcing bars and fewer of them than the ones specified in the contract, not realizing that this markedly reduced the surface area, and with it the bonding power, of the steel. Francis Young, of the University of Illinois, says that notable accidents occur "every five years," generally in the spring or fall, when temperatures are fluctuating widely. Usually the collapses occur during construction and without loss of life. But other specialists believe that they are simply the most visible portion of widespread sloppiness that reduces durability.

The political environment has not helped to extend concrete's life either. As one engineer puts it, "The politicians are always there for the ribbon-cutting, but just try asking them for money for maintenance." As an example of misplaced priorities, many cite the fact that until 1976 the Federal Highway Trust Fund was allowed to spend money only for new interstate-highway construction, not for repairs. Annual increases in infrastructure

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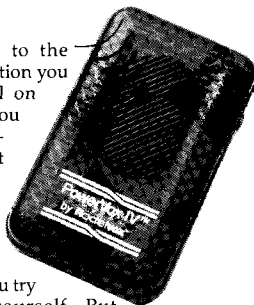
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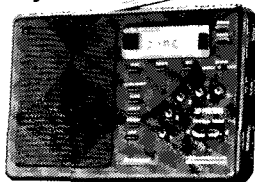
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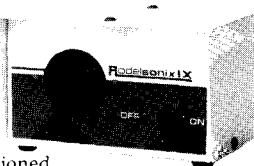
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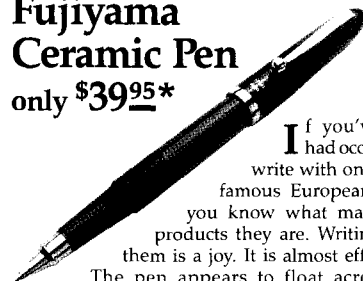
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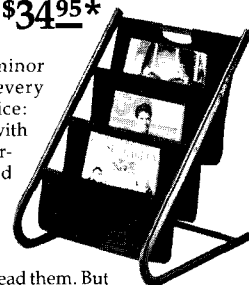


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spending dropped from 4.5 percent in the sixties to less than one percent in the eighties. Currently about \$30 billion is sitting idly in various infrastructure-related trust funds for a political reason: it makes the federal deficit appear lower. Such federal policies have left maintenance to state and local governments, whose budgets are already severely strained. New York City, for instance, recently announced that it would reduce spending on bridge repair from \$1.2 billion to \$930 million, thus postponing work on some bridges until after 1995, even if they have to be closed down in the meantime. The Bush Administration recently proposed a \$105 billion federal and state highway-building initiative that would include an increase in spending for bridge repair from \$1.8 billion in 1992 to \$2.8 billion in 1996. But for the moment the deterioration continues unchecked. "The infrastructure is like a house," Surendra Shah explains. "If you don't do anything to it for thirty or forty years, you have a problem."

But the concrete industry has not been an innocent bystander as America's concrete crumbles. "During the Eisenhower Administration," Shah says, "we discovered highways and television. After forty years the cost of TV has fallen and the quality improved. Can we say the same of highways? Okay, why not?" One reason has to be the general complacency of the industry, which tends to view concrete as a commodity item that is just fine as it is. In the 1970s a system of coating reinforcing steel with epoxy was developed to make it impervious to corrosive salts. Although epoxy coating has been shown to be beneficial, it has only recently been widely employed in the nation's roadways. In the past few years researchers have devised a technique called cathodic protection, in which the steel reinforcement is connected to a low-voltage DC current, to counter the destructive electrical current flowing through the bars. This technique has shown significant promise but has yet to be widely implemented. Finally, the new high-strength concretes that have been a boon to skyscraper construction offer significant promise in extending concrete's durability as well. They employ synthetic fluids called "superplasticizers" to cut down on the concrete's water content without reducing workability. They use silica fumes—minute particles that are a waste product of computer-chip manufacture—to fill in concrete's pores. Such additives have not yet been widely employed in public-works projects. "The problem with our infrastructure is not really the knowledge," Surendra Shah says. "The problem is getting the knowledge out of the laboratory and into practice."

The Glamour Problem

ANOTHER REASON THAT CONCRETE HASN'T KEPT up with television is so obvious that it is rarely mentioned: concrete's deplorable image. Modern concrete developed in the late eighteenth century as a waterproof version of the rammed earth—mud, really—that had been used for construction before that. Concrete technology had been abandoned—forgotten, most likely—since the time of the Romans. A less lovable building material is hard to imagine. It lacks all human scale, it looks dirty, and it is so rough that a chance encounter can draw blood. Concrete has not benefited from its service as the ultimate holding tank for

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much that is undesirable, be it criminals, hazardous-waste products, or the compacted remains of Jimmy Hoffa. It says something that nearly all the really good stories about concrete are untrue. A Chicago concrete supplier told me a wonderful tale about a concrete-truck driver who was so outraged to discover the car of his wife's lover in his driveway one afternoon that he emptied a full load in the man's car window. Unfortunately, the same story turns up in *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, a volume on urban folktales. And no Mafia experts could confirm for me the mob's supposed fondness for "cement overshoes."

Concrete has always had its architectural partisans, most notably Le Corbusier, who took its harshness for authenticity, and Eero Saarinen, who exploited its sculptural qualities so fluidly that his TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport suggests a bird in flight. The public has not always been so enthusiastic. Concrete's last heyday came in the 1960s, with an architectural trend known as Brutalism, which made use of its possibilities for monumental forms. That movement started to peter out in 1969, when one Yale student felt so oppressed by the massive Brutalist scheme of Yale's Art and Architecture building (designed by the chairman of the school's architecture department, Paul Rudolph) that he set fire to it. Moshe Safdie, the designer of the all-concrete Habitat at Expo '67, now admits that "people like concrete only when it doesn't look like concrete." I. M. Pei is probably the foremost architect using concrete today. His concrete work in the East Building of the National Gallery and in the Louvre looks like limestone. To get such a smooth finish, he uses forms built by cabinetmakers of hardwoods instead of the more conventional plywood forms built by workmen. Since concrete bears the imprint of the forms that shaped it, it often resembles petrified plywood, right down to the rough grains and football-shaped knothole plugs.

Concrete's inherent drabness has dampened the spirits of the little community of concrete specialists as much as of those obliged to live in concrete housing projects. One

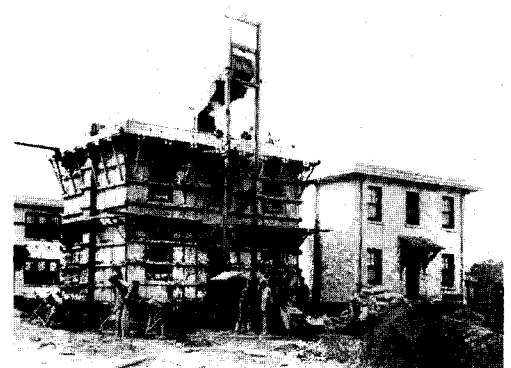
career researcher greeted me over the phone by asking, "Why do you want to talk about something as boring as concrete?" And the Portland Cement Association, the trade association for cement manufacturers, in Skokie, Illinois, was so tickled that I would come for a visit all the way from my home in Massachusetts that its Construction Technology Laboratory posted a large sign by the front door, welcoming me in capital letters. I got the feeling that no one else had come around in years.

When specialists talk about the image problem, they usually do so in terms of concrete's being taken for granted, by which they mean that concrete is not scorned but merely overlooked, because of its apparent simplicity. Either way, society has tried to ignore the substance, and it is paying the price, for there is still much to be learned. "Our knowledge of concrete gets shakier and shakier the deeper we delve into it," Francis Young says. At the visible level matters seem clear enough. At the microscopic level researchers are only just beginning to get an idea of what is happening. At the molecular level they are still in a total fog. Yet researchers are in short supply. Concrete has never been viewed as an area worthy of intensive academic study, and there is no equivalent of, say, metallurgy for concrete. The country's relatively few concrete specialists have had to train themselves, designing their own programs of chemistry, physics, materials science, and civil engineering. The organization that comes closest to treating concrete in an academic fashion is the American Society of Civil Engineers, which every year sponsors a concrete-canoe race to demonstrate its interest in the material. (It was won last year by Michigan State University's "Rowing Stone," a 17.5-foot U-shaped canoe employing special lightweight aggregates of ceramic particles.)

Improvements to concrete are increasingly being made overseas, where the material receives greater respect. The usefulness of silica fumes was discovered in Norway, and superplasticizers in Germany and Japan. The Portland Cement Association, which was through the 1960s



Images of concrete from around 1918: promotional advertisements (page 76; facing page); early methods of paving (left); and some of the concrete houses Thomas Edison built in Union, New Jersey (below).



responsible for nearly all the American advances in the understanding of concrete, has substantially cut back its basic research and in the past thirty years has reduced its work force from 1,100 to seventy-five. At the PCA's testing laboratory the equipment has difficulty crushing samples of the new high-strength concretes to determine their compressive strengths. The machine is essentially an enormous hydraulic-powered nutcracker; the strain of generating the necessary pressure causes a small earthquake each time it succeeds in bursting a sample, jiggling microscopes all through the building.

Surendra Shah blames a too-diversified construction industry for the lack of research. He notes that in Japan construction companies control virtually every stage of the construction process, including the fabrication of materials, thereby giving them the scale and incentive to create the best possible concrete. Recently the National Science Foundation tried to rectify the problem by integrating five of the country's concrete-research laboratories into the coordinated center that Shah heads. There I found it startling to see chunks of concrete being analyzed by earnest graduate students wielding enormous electron-scanning microscopes, rainbow-colored laser holograms, and acoustical sensing devices for charting "microseismic" activity. I nearly thought there had been some mistake. Didn't they know this was just *concrete*?

Early Enthusiasm

THE MODERN CONCRETE INDUSTRY BEGAN humbly, in 1824, in Leeds, England, when an obscure bricklayer named Joseph Aspdin patented a recipe for Portland cement, the bonding agent in today's concrete. To make his cement, Aspdin scraped up quantities of limestone that had spilled onto the road near a local lime works, combined it with some clay, and heated up the mixture in his beehive kiln to far higher temperatures than had been previously attempted. For fifty years before that, builders had tinkered with various "natural cements" (naturally occurring mixtures of limestone and clay) that they essentially scooped out of the earth, just as the Romans had done almost 2,000 years before, heating and mixing the cement with aggregates. Aspdin was the first to make the manufacture of cement into anything close to an industrial process.

Concrete Roads and Roast Beef



THIS load of roast beef, live stock from farms in the vicinity of Indianapolis, Ind., is on its way over one of the **concrete roads** and **concrete roads** existed in Marion Co., farmers in the neighborhood had to sell live stock to dealers, who bought enough cattle in the neighborhood to make a carload for shipment to Indianapolis.

What the **concrete roads** leading to Indianapolis have done for stock raisers is best told by Joseph Jackson, one of the prominent farmers of Lebanon, Indiana.

Read what he says:

"During the past few months **concrete roads** have enabled me to ship live stock direct to the yards by motor truck, eliminating the middle man and saving me his profit.

"It also saves shrinkage in weight of the cattle, caused by loading, shipping and unloading from freight cars, and I can ship as often as I have stock ready for the market, without waiting to get together a carload, which often makes it

You see that roast beef may depend on **concrete roads**—that roads are a great factor in regular distribution of food products. Read again the second paragraph of Mr. Jackson's letter above. It gives some of the reasons why

necessary to include animals still under full weight. "Shipping by truck would be expensive over poor roads and often impossible. Overconcrete you can keep your trucks going the year round, with the least wear and tear and with a minimum of gasoline.

"Concrete roads and motor trucks are and will be hereafter a great aid to the farmer shipping produce and live stock to the market."

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CONCRETE FOR PERMANENCE



In his patent application Aspdin cloaked the details of his formula in mystery. In retrospect it appears that he may not have known exactly what was in it. After much sleuthing, a competitor named Isaac C. Johnson concluded that Aspdin simply scattered handfuls of various powders willy-nilly into the kiln like an improvising chef. But Aspdin displayed a keen marketing talent, naming his cement after Portland stone, the most impressive stone of its day, quarried at the Isle of Portland. Sir Christopher Wren had specified Portland stone for the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral after the fire of 1666.

Although Portland cement was quickly shown to be stronger than the natural variety, Americans did not produce any until 1871. Natural cement had been discovered in 1818 by an engineer named Canvass White near Fayetteville, New York, and was quickly put to use in

building concrete locks for the Erie Canal. The American cement business expanded with the canals, following the westward path of the Erie, the Richmond and Allegheny, the Chesapeake and Ohio, and the Lehigh. Each enterprise profited from the other: the cement built the canals, and canal barges distributed the cement.

Europeans had been erecting concrete buildings since the end of the previous century, but Americans didn't think to try that until 1835, when a concrete promoter in New York City named Obadiah Parker built his office—in surviving sketches a rather elegant little place, with Doric columns out front—entirely of concrete. Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York *Tribune*, was one of the more

notable Americans to further the cause. He built a concrete barn in Chappaqua, New York, in 1852. But concrete's versatility was seriously limited by its low tensile strength. Walls had to be thick as a bank vault's to hold a roof up. In 1867 a French gardener named Joseph Monier devised a system of reinforcing concrete flower pots with wire mesh. The construction industry seized on this idea, adapting it to solve many problems. An array of iron reinforcing bars—square, spiral, nubbed—were introduced before the industry finally settled on the current ribbed pattern.

William E. Ward, an American mechanical engineer, independently came upon the idea of iron reinforcement the same year Monier did, when he saw how much trouble workmen had removing hardened concrete from their shovels and concluded that cement and iron had a natural

affinity. Ward was terribly afraid of fire, and he was determined to build a house that couldn't burn down. And so he built in Port Chester, New York, a grand château of reinforced concrete with a crenelated tower, which was called "Ward's Castle" or "Ward's Folly." (It is now the Museum of Cartoon Art.) The only wood in the house was used for the window frames, doors, and stair rails.

The first reinforced-concrete bridge in the United States came in 1889; it was a twenty-foot span with an imitation rough-stone finish in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. The first concrete street followed in 1891, at Bellefontaine, Ohio; it was installed by a concrete dealer eager to create a new market for his product, which he did. (The street is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year.) The first major concrete dam was the Hoover Dam, on the Colorado River, finished in 1936. So much concrete was required for the job—some 4.5 million cubic yards altogether—that the construction team built a concrete supply company at the site. That much concrete generates a tremendous amount of heat during the hydration, or hardening, process; engineers calculated at the time that if the concrete were laid down in one continuous pour, rather than in thousands of small, carefully vented blocks, it would take 125 years to cool.

The first reinforced-concrete high-rise came in 1903, the fifteen-story Ingall's Building, in Cincinnati. In 1908 Thomas Edison tried concrete for cheap housing—or, as the *New York Press* termed it, "cosy houses for working men." Apparently he found concrete nearly as intriguing as electricity. He made significant improvements in the rotary kiln for cement manufacture, and he owned a cement plant in New Jersey. Edison perfected his concrete-building technique by molding a chicken coop in his back yard. "Members of my family laughed at

Concrete walls and floors lend fire-safety and permanence to this beautiful home at Jackson, Mississippi. Architects, N. W. Overstreet and A. H. Town.

DADDY SAYS:
*Our new house
can't burn 'cause
it's CONCRETE*

YOUR family and prized personal possessions are safer in a concrete home. For concrete can't burn. And it sturdily resists the attacks of storm, time and decay.

Beautiful—Comfortable—Livable. It's so easy to have exactly the home you've dreamed of with concrete. It is adaptable to any architectural style from Cape Cod to Modern; any surface texture and color. What's more, your concrete home will be delightfully livable—ug and dry in winter, cool in summer. It will remain free from such annoying faults as leaky, uneven floors, sagging walls, sticking doors and

Low Upkeep—High Resale Value. With all these advantages concrete costs less. Lower upkeep and higher resale value far more than repay any extra first cost.

35,000 New Concrete Homes. Over 35,000 families have chosen concrete for their new homes in the past three years because it affords the best combination of structural qualities and architectural features.

Insist on Concrete Floors. Every home should have concrete floors; fireproof, rigid, warm, quiet. Take any other flooring—wood, linoleum, etc.





Concrete houses never caught on, despite the efforts of ads (left, 1939), developers (1880 row houses, above), or William Ward, whose 1876 "Folly" (right) arose from his terrible fear of fire.



me when I told them I was going to make a chicken coop out of concrete," he declared when the job was done, "but they are not laughing at me now." He built eleven concrete houses in Union, New Jersey, each of them cast in one continuous pour using exceptionally elaborate iron molds developed by Edison himself. A number of the houses survive, and they look surprisingly posh. Everything was made of concrete, including plumbing, chimneys, mantels, stairway balusters, and bathtubs. The houses cost \$1,200 each, a quarter of the price of conventional houses. They didn't catch on.

Natural cement pretty much died out at the turn of the century. Today portland cement (the patent was dropped after the patent expired) is produced by fifty-six companies operating 123 plants in thirty-eight states. The industry is a regional one primarily because of high transportation costs, which are due to the sheer weight of the product; most plants are located within 200 miles of their markets. Because of the generally low rate of return on investment, American owners have recently been opting out of the business, leaving 65 percent of it to foreigners, mostly Europeans, who are unable to expand in their native countries in part because of far higher real-estate costs.

Cement manufacturing today follows the essential principles formulated by Aspdin. Limestone and clay are quarried, crushed, and sorted, and then heated in tremendous rotary kilns to 2700° Fahrenheit. (To reduce the fuel bill, some companies have turned to burning discarded automobile tires and other combustible garbage drawn from local landfills.) The resulting glassy pellets, or clinker, are pulverized to a powder so fine that it will pass through a sieve that holds water. The fineness is critical, since the smaller the particles, the greater the total surface area, and the bonding power of cement is primarily a matter of surface attractions.

The cement is shipped by tanker truck to the country's 4,000 concrete producers, called ready-mix companies after the state of their product. The ready-mix compa-

nies are even more widely dispersed than the cement makers, since as a rule the trucks have only ninety minutes to reach their destination before the concrete "locks up" in the mixer. "If that happens you've really got problems," says Wayne Tarr, of J. H. McNamara, a prominent Massachusetts ready-mix firm. "All you can do is open up the hold and start jackhammering."

Ready-mix companies hold reserves of aggregates, cement, water, and additives, mix them to order, and then ship the wet concrete to the construction site in concrete-mixer trucks, their drums spinning to retard setting. On big jobs the trucks line up dozens deep to be emptied by a boom crane that pumps the concrete out through a long hose to the job site. (For high-rises the concrete is pumped up the side of the building through a pipe.) There gangs of workmen take over to smooth into place with trowels the concrete for flooring, or tamp it with long vibrators into the upright forms for walls. They work fast to keep up with the concrete flow; if the hose ever had to stop, the concrete inside could lock up in minutes.

Since the ready-mix plants all buy their own aggregates locally, concrete from one part of the country is never exactly like concrete from another. "You can't assume it's all the same box of Wheaties," says Harold Roth, an architect and faculty member at the Yale School of Architecture. The sand is saltier at the coasts, and the hardness of local rocks varies markedly. All concrete is tested regularly at the site for strength and wateriness, to make sure it conforms to industry standards.

Popularity Contest

AS THE TWENTIETH CENTURY HAS PROGRESSED, the concrete industry has succeeded in turning the United States noticeably grayer (and pinker, yellower, and tanner too, now that concrete companies have started offering such designer tints as "dusty mauve," "coachella sand," and "mesa beige").

Concrete has by no means spread uniformly from coast to coast, however, although it has made a clean sweep of certain market niches, such as large dams and airport runways, which turned away from asphalt in the 1960s, when the planes got so heavy that they required concrete's rigidity to support them. But in broader markets, such as building construction and highway paving, which account for 65 percent and 22 percent, respectively, of all concrete sales, the pattern is harder to discern.

According to Portland Cement Association statistics, concrete is used most in the Southeast, the Midwest, and the Far West, and least in the Rocky Mountain states and New England. Cities like Chicago, Houston, and Seattle have become known as "good concrete towns," while others, such as New York, Pittsburgh, and Boston, are not so good. Some of the regional differences stem from practical matters. One architect explains New York's resistance to concrete by asking, "Can you imagine trying to get fifty concrete trucks down Broadway?" And local costs of competing products are obviously a consideration. A political factor like the Mafia's alleged infiltration of ready-mix suppliers in New York can tip the balance, as can the quantity and quality of the supply of available concrete. Even light is a factor: concrete simply doesn't look as good under the gray skies of the Northeast as it does under the bright-blue skies typical of the Southwest. But a key ingredient is the inherent bias of major building contractors. They go with the material they like, and what they like is often what they're used to.

Yet a region's attitude toward concrete can turn on the actions of surprisingly few people. Chicago was not known for its concrete until 1961, when a structural engineer named William Schmidt became determined to build out of concrete a forty-story high-rise apartment building called Outer Drive East. The architects were put off by the massive supporting columns required; their size decreased the amount of rentable space, especially on the ground floor, which could be rented to retailers. Schmidt spurred on his concrete supplier, Material Service, to create a stronger concrete that would not need to be so thick. Material Service in turn spurred on its researchers, and the result was the first use of high-strength concrete in an American high-rise. Largely because of its leadership in high-strength concrete, Chicago has most of the country's tallest concrete high-rises and is recognized as the country's concrete capital.

For marketing purposes concrete faces a war on all sides. As one public-relations official at the Portland Cement Association wearily told me, "We compete with everybody." Despite Thomas Edison's efforts, concrete has not done well against wood in the domestic single-family-housing market, although it is common for small houses in many parts of Europe. Here the time required to pour and place the concrete makes concrete houses more expensive than wooden ones, which can be quickly assembled of plywood and two-by-fours, even though

concrete is far more long-lasting and completely fireproof besides. Surendra Shah notes that European visitors are often astonished to discover fire departments virtually on every corner in the United States.

Concrete has been more successful battling steel in high-rises, where wood is not an option. Its first victory was in residential high-rises. The low tensile strength of concrete traditionally limited its horizontal reach, but the small rooms in apartments created relatively short spans for it to cover. The wide-open floor plans of office buildings, in contrast, left concrete out of the picture until the development of high-strength concrete, which has greater tensile as well as compressive strength, and so is able to cover the critical horizontal spans.

On the highway concrete faces a bitter contest with asphalt, and the division between them is a large and unresolved controversy in the highway-construction business. "Very smart people argue both sides of the issue," says David Hensing, the deputy executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "Which is better depends on local circumstances." Of all the paved roads in the nation (more roads are unpaved than paved), 93 percent are covered with asphalt, but that figure largely reflects the secondary roads and city streets that make up the bulk of American auto routes. Asphalt and concrete currently divide the 42,000 miles of the interstate highway system sixty-forty. A look at the map makes the choice seem completely arbitrary: southern Indiana's highways, for example, are paved mostly with asphalt, while northern Indiana's are paved mostly with concrete. Asphalt is cheaper to lay than concrete, but it is significantly softer and wears out much faster under heavy loads. And if concrete does require work, it costs substantially more to fix. The choice comes down to the preference of the politicians in charge, many of whom find asphalt's lower initial cost appealing. "It's a take-care-of-it-now-and-I'll-be-out-of-office-in-two-years kind of thing," says Rita Knorr, the director of research for the American Public Works Association. "That's pretty much what decides it." And that is precisely the attitude that has brought the national infrastructure to its current state of disrepair.

Concrete will never win over all construction markets, of course, but it is remarkable how well it competes in so many of them. And the current concrete revolution should improve its prospects, which is all to the good. For concrete may be the only material capable of supporting the sheer weight of our overgrown society, with its ever-heavier planes, ever-greater automobile traffic, ever-higher sewage flows, ever-taller buildings, ever-deadlier wastes. All concrete needs now is to be appreciated. □

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A Short Story



Consider This, Señora

by Harriet Doerr

ONE SUMMER, SEVERAL YEARS ago, a widow named Morgan Sloane, barely past forty, mother of two, came to live among a dozen exiles in the Mexican town of Santa Felicia. The hill where the foreigners lived, with their bridge tables, vegetable rows, and wide green view, bordered the southern edge of town. An overgrown strip of park and a zoo of fifteen cages divided the slope from the houses of the poor, who crowded together on the outskirts of the city. On clear evenings jukebox music and an occasional lion's roar rose in the still air and reached the expatriates' open windows.

The first time Morgan heard the lion, she asked Carlos about it.

"Where is that animal?"

"In the zoological garden," he said. "Monkeys are there also, and macaws. You will hear them all."

Carlos was the *mozo* who came with the house. He polished the floors, watered the roses and the limes, drove the car, and, when guests arrived, put on a white jacket and served vodka and Cuba libres. The moment he was out of the room, some woman would say, "So handsome," and another would add, "Those eyes."

Morgan spoke to him in abbreviated sentences of the Castilian Spanish she remembered from a college year in Seville.

"How many houses are there on the hill?" she asked soon after her arrival, and Carlos said, "Eight. Four are owned by North Americans, two by English, one by a French, and one by Danes."

"Why have these people come here?"

"Consider this, señora," Carlos said, and from the



edge of the terrace where they stood he embraced the landscape, drawing to him the municipality of Santa Felicia, the *presidencia*, the cathedral, the zoo, and all the plowed and wooded world beyond. "Consider the sun, the pure air, and the view. Consider the tranquillity. These people have abandoned their other lives. Now they have this." He lifted his hand.

Morgan listened while Carlos, in these words, described flight.

Like the other dwellers on the hill, Morgan had fled. She had taken flight from the sheer weight of the events of the past year. These included a loss of patience with infidelities, a legal separation from her husband, and her widowhood a few months later, when, stricken without warning, he died.

"Your husband has given you this house," Carlos remarked on the day of her arrival, and she said, "Yes," without adding that this husband, or former husband, Ned, had left her everything he owned. Whether by mistake, believing he had half a lifetime left to change his will, or by intention, she might never know.

"And you will live here alone," Carlos said. "Until your family comes to visit you."

Morgan said nothing. She chose not to mention her daughter or her son, children who still existed but somewhere out of sight, lost in the tumult of their causes, inhabiting communes, organizing marches, tossing away their past.

On her first night in Ned's Mexican house Morgan shivered for an hour between sheets that had been folded damp, and wondered whose side of the bed this was, Ned's or a woman's. Awake in the white room, she had

The gentlemen, one at a time, took Stevie outside and, each according to the degree of his longing, kissed her

heard the rain stop and had walked barefoot to the window to push it open. A gust of wind blew in the smell of drenched earth and a shower of scattered drops. Below her, at the foot of the hill, lights glimmered: Santa Felicia, most of its citizens asleep at home, the rest huddled in portals to keep dry, wearing newspapers for capes and paper bags for hats.

Morgan turned back to her wide bed. Behind it hung a long red tapestry, and now, for the first time, she noticed the headboard. It was made of heavy pine, stained dark. Across it, carved in high relief, swam two mermaids, tails curled, breasts high.

was the result not of training but simply of instinct.

Another morning, while Morgan half sat, half lay in the garden with a straw hat tilted over her eyes, she asked, "Where do you live?" and Carlos pointed his arm in the direction of a village on the back of the hill, where the slope was less steep. Later she visited this place, where a scattering of adobe huts appeared to have been spun off by a derelict plaza into fields and gullies and a stand of tall weeds.

Goya, the cook, also lived behind the hill. Like Carlos, she had come with the house. Morgan made one inspection and after that avoided the kitchen, where the gaunt,



MORGAN ADJUSTED QUICKLY TO THE PACE of life in her house on the hill. Each empty day was a prism to hang on a chain. Stretched out on a long chair in the shade of a plum tree, she watched Carlos at his work. His smooth, honey-colored fingers tied up vines or clipped grass with easy familiarity.

"You have had experience with gardens," she said.

Carlos denied this. "No, señora. Ever since primary school I've worked for my uncle, who is a potter." He looked up and attached his steady gaze to her face. "Until your husband employed me last year," he went on, "and gave me better pay."

And Morgan realized that his talent with plants

lined woman padded barefoot across the spotted floor. Goya's parrot, when not released to roam the shelves, hung by its beak from the wires of its cage and sent seeds and feathers showering over platters of enchiladas and pots of refried beans.

The cook, like Carlos, had a thin curved nose and deep eyes.

"Is she your grandmother?" Morgan asked.

"No, my mother," Carlos said, and Morgan suppressed a gasp. So great a space of time between them, one so old and one so young. But the resemblance was there, the inheritance of fine bones, handed down through long generations of Tarascan Indians, whose land this state of Mexico once was.

WITH THE MERMAIDS AT HER HEAD, MORGAN woke every morning to a brilliant early sun and the sound of a girl singing. The high clear voice, which at first she confused with birdsong, came over the wall from the garden of the house next door.

Tracing its source, Morgan found that one bedroom window overlooked an enclosed jungle of honeysuckle and morning glory. In one corner a trumpet vine strangled a mimosa; in another a fig tree bent under a climbing rose.

"That is the house of the sick *Inglese*," Carlos told her. "The girl who sings is her maid, Lalia."

they came with poinsettias and hand-knit throws, and hung tin stars and angels from her bedroom walls.

Morgan, a week after her arrival, noticing an excess of flowers in her garden, thinned them out and delivered a basketful by way of Carlos to her neighbor.

Fliss sent back a note. "You have turned my room into a bower. Come for tea some afternoon. Lalia will tell you when. I am not strong." But, Morgan told herself, sequestered as she is, feeding as she does on gossip and desserts, she is bound to outlive us all.

Morgan had never seen anyone as happy as Lalia. Singing, she emptied dishwater on the scruff of grass be-



"She is very young for that work," Morgan said.

"She is fifteen," Carlos said. "She lives in my village."

The sick Englishwoman was Fliss McBride. Morgan learned her story from other neighbors on the hill. Soon after Fliss had moved here, ten years ago, she contracted pneumonia. The case was simple, followed by complete recovery, but from then on Fliss never left her bed.

When she was convalescing, the doctor told her, "Sit in a chair tomorrow. Go downstairs Sunday. Spend some time outdoors," and, finally, "You are well." But he had to give up in the end.

The people on the hill visited Fliss and brought her gifts, custards and sweets and sometimes slips of plants for Lalia to press into the crowded earth. At Christmas

hind Fliss's house. Singing, she rode home on the bus from the downtown market, carrying cheeses, melons, cooking oil, and kilos of sugar and rice in a basket she could barely lift. Scarcely breaking her song, she staggered down the steps of the bus, allowing the driver to pinch her as she passed.

Sometimes at night Morgan imagined she heard her *mozo*'s voice rising out of the tangle of stems in her neighbor's garden. From her window she would see a flicker of apron strings, and early the next morning she would hear song again.

Morgan saw that Carlos also was happy, but in a different way. He was a man content with himself. One day Lalia told her that other men respected Carlos for his cus-

tomary even temper and occasional quick right fist. Women looked out from the doorways where they swept or sewed, or, in the case of foreigners, stared from the windows of their imported cars, as Carlos passed.

Morgan, too, noticed him. In the *sala* she abandoned the letter she was writing to watch him as, wasting neither time nor motion, and in silence, he laid a fire. When he drove the car, she sat in front and saw him in clean Indian profile as he spoke.

"There is talk of improving the zoological garden," he would say. "The cages are too small. A number of the animals have died." He would point. "Over there, se-ñora, you will see the monkeys' hut. It is a barbarity." Morgan, unmoved, consistently refused to look.

She spent hours of sunshine on a terrace chair, eyes closed, measuring her past, drawing blinds against the uncertain, looming future. Not far away her neighbor, Fliss, also reclined flat on her back, facing south. Day after day Morgan and the Englishwoman lay on separate sides of the wall in independent retrospection as the mornings of their lives slid by.

Every day Morgan imagined the unrevealed places where her children might be. She had reached them with the greatest difficulty, one in New Mexico and one in Quebec, to tell them of their father's death. The telephone connections were bad. She had scarcely recognized their toneless voices.

"Tell me how you are," she had said, and they replied, "All right." But what else was there to say to the woman who had rejected their father only months before he died?

These children were Morgan's hourly torment. She tried and failed to invent futures for them. Meanwhile, the girl, Stevie, and the boy, Greg, both scarcely out of

adolescence, remained in peril. Morgan longed to push them back into infancy, contain them again in cribs and strollers.

Day after day she cultivated hatred against her dead husband, and daily failed to achieve it. At any moment of any hour she would have had him back if she could.

And she continued to watch Carlos, as he bent over a geranium or a pot of mint with the grace of a man about to kiss a woman's hand.

JUST AS LALIA'S SINGING WAS THE FIRST THING Morgan heard in the morning, the watchman's whistle was the last thing she heard at night. This watchman, a retired clerk, arrived among the foreigners' houses on the last bus each evening and left at daybreak by way of a path that dropped straight down the hillside from the Frenchman's pear trees to the zoo. The watchman's whistle was his only defense against trespassers and thieves. It had a lilt-ing, uncertain tone, and he blew it once every hour in front of each house. Neither he nor his eight employers contemplated the purchase of another weapon. Even though the cooks and *mozos* returned to the village at night, leaving the foreigners—mostly women, children, the aged, and the tipsy—behind, the stone houses circled by stone walls were considered impregnable.

Of the houses on the hill behind Santa Felicia, Morgan's had the heaviest iron gate. Her wall was higher than the others and was topped with a fiercer dazzle of broken glass. Even so, she understood that it was not too great a barrier for a determined man to climb.

Before long Morgan's days fell into a routine. She woke to singing, breakfasted on mangoes and sugared rolls, sat

THE LISTENERS

Something is going to happen
before this night is done.
They know, these children do,
the signs: certain smells,
hard-edged laughter, voices
rising from the kitchen
hour by sleepless hour.
They can close doors, plead
Stop, oh please stop into pillows
no matter how many times.
It won't. Each pause is prelude
to anything but silence, but sleep.

Late, one of them may venture
down the stairs—holding up
pajama bottoms, their elastic
gone slack with wear—
take her by the hand, as if
no one had tried this before,
and whisper in the loud room,
Come to bed, Mom? Please?
She won't this time, either,
old wrongs rising up in her words,
flailing, blind as need, needing
to be put right. The listeners
will have to go on listening hard
for what they don't want to hear

until finally he slams her
against furniture, a wall—they know
the sound a body makes
in falling. She'll be bruised
around the eyes again, tomorrow,
her nose broken, perhaps.
Or worse. They've seen worse.
Childhood is all around
them, forward and back.
Something is going to happen.
And happen. And happen.

—Eric Trethewey

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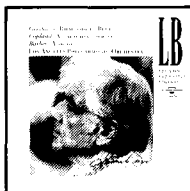
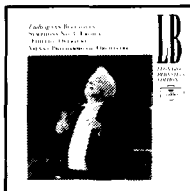
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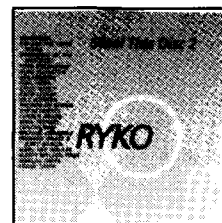


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in contemplation on the terrace in the sun. At eleven o'clock Carlos drove her headlong down the road to the fruit and vegetable stalls, the bakery, and the post office. She herself chose the papayas, the fresh corn, the hard rolls, but at the post office she waited in the car. Cripples and deformed children sometimes approached her at these times, and she averted her eyes as she handed them coins.

Carlos soon realized that the letters the señora addressed to her children all came back. He would push his way toward her down the post-office steps, through the ranks of incoming clients and seated beggars, and hand her letters marked "Unknown."

"Look, señora," he would say. "Another letter has been returned. Why not investigate the address?" And then they would drive home in silence.

Morgan had lived in the house a month when she asked Carlos to hang her mirror, a long rectangle of glass framed in scalloped tin which had leaned in a corner since she came. In her bedroom the *mozo*, instead of taking up the hammer and nail, paused in front of her chest of drawers. On it were two photographs, one of a light-haired freckled boy with so much trouble in his eyes that he might just have learned that his dog was dead. The other was of a girl, also fair, who could have been any age—fourteen, sixteen, twenty—a blue-eyed girl on a swing, smiling.

"Let me show you the place to drive the nail," Morgan said.

Carlos continued to look at the pictures. "Are these your children, señora?"

"Yes. Stevie and Greg." And when he didn't recognize the nicknames, she gave the full renderings. "Stephanie," she told him.

"Ah, Estefania," Carlos said. And when he heard the name Gregory, he said, "Gregorio."

Morgan saw he had further questions. "Here is the hammer," she said quickly, and showed him the spot where the mirror was to hang.

Carlos pounded in the nail. "Your husband bought this glass," he informed her. "But it was never put in place."

Morgan felt relief. She was wrong, then, to have believed she had caught glimpses of Lalia there.

Carlos stood back. "Look. It is defective." He pointed to the top, where a wavy band ran across the glass. "Step in front of it, señora."

Morgan realized at once that this mirror had a magic glaze. The crown of her head dissolved and undulated, but from the forehead down a beautiful woman stared back at her. Out of a smooth young face a pair of Welsh green eyes met hers, a wide mouth smiled. Years fell away. This was how she used to look. It had all come back.

The *mozo*'s face appeared in the glass at one side. From over her shoulder he cast his eagle's glance at her reflection. Leaning forward, he touched it where it was flawed.

"The defect is only at the top," she pointed out.

"Permit me, señora," Carlos said. "I have a friend in the alley behind the cathedral. His business is mirrors. He can cut you a perfect glass."

Morgan shook her head. "This one will do."

No sooner was the mirror hung than Morgan saw a change in Carlos. He began to seek her out with questions. "Am I to repair the kitchen drain?" "Shall I set these two loose bricks?" Wherever she was, in the house, outside, he found work to do not far away. He often gazed at her for so long that she began to invent ways to deal with the remarks she imagined he was about to make.

The more Morgan looked in the mirror, the more the *mozo* looked at Morgan. Or so it clearly appeared to her.

NOW IT WAS SEPTEMBER. SUMMER WAS ENDING, though tropical storms still regularly produced spectacles of light and sound against the evening sky. On the hillside the leaves of cactus were beaded along their edge with magenta fruit, and small pale flowers embroidered the banks of ditches. Morgan gave Carlos seven invitations to deliver.

"For the people on the hill," she told him. "For next Friday."

On the Monday before the party Morgan, with a straw hat over her face, lay motionless in a long chair on the terrace. A loud interior silence prevented her from hearing Carlos until he spoke, directly above her. As far as she knew, he might have been standing there, looking down at her, for half an hour.

"Allow me a suggestion," he said. "If you invite your children by telegram, they can be here by Friday, and sleep one in the small room upstairs and one on the sofa in the *sala*."

Morgan removed the hat from her face. Carlos was regarding her thoughtfully. A current generated behind the *mozo*'s eyes ran between her ribs with the speed of light.

She shook her head. "That is impossible," she said, and almost went on, *The places where they live are unmarked. Their houses have no numbers. Their streets have no names.*

AT SIX O'CLOCK THURSDAY, AT THE HEIGHT OF a tropical storm, Morgan's daughter arrived uninvited at the gate. She had come up the hill on the last bus with the watchman.

Carlos recognized her immediately through the downpour. "You are the señora's daughter," he said. "Good evening, señorita."

"Hi," Stevie said.

Carlos looked for luggage, found only a knapsack, and led this Estefania to a chair in front of the fire. Then he took from her, as she removed them, a plastic poncho, a man's red vest, two long scarves, and a pair of boots of the

sort that soldiers wear. The girl leaned toward the flame in a torn black sweater as tight as skin and a green skirt so long it had trailed in gutters, wet and dry. Hair fell to her shoulders and covered half her face. This was not the light hair of the picture in the bedroom. This hair was the color of frying oil that had been used too many times. It was the eyes Carlos recognized, bright blue jewels.

"Permit me to call your *mamá*," the *mozo* said.

When Morgan came into the *sala*, she looked only into those eyes. The hair, the feet, the broken nails, the torn sweater, the unhappy skirt—these things she ignored. She talked to her daughter in trial phrases, tentatively. Neither asked a question of the other. Morgan did not say, "Oh, Stevie, where have you been? Oh, Stevie." Nor did the girl accuse her, saying, "What happened between you and Dad? Were there other women? Do you hate him now?"

"I'm taking the Saturday bus to Chiapas," Stevie said. Morgan did not ask why Chiapas, hundreds of miles away from here. They skirted the pertinent issues of the heart and spoke of peripheral things—Santa Felicia, the house, the other people on the hill, the lush countryside with its brimming lakes and ponds.

"I'm going to give you my room," Morgan said. "It has a window that overlooks the town." And she asked Carlos to take Stevie's knapsack to the large bedroom.

After dinner Stevie spoke again of Chiapas. "I'm going there to see Greg." An extended pause followed. Then Stevie said, "He's working in San Cristóbal."

The relief Morgan felt at these words was like a soft south wind blowing across frozen steppes. So he was somewhere after all. She saw him in San Cristóbal, still freckled, still seventeen.

"He sits on the sidewalk in Indian clothes," Stevie said, "and sells jewelry to tourists."

This was something Morgan could easily imagine, Greg on a steep street of the old colonial town. She saw him in native dress, the loose white pants and shirt, the white sarape with the cerise border, the flat sombrero with the braided ribbon band. An unreasonable contentment filled her.

ON THE DAY OF THE PARTY STEVIE, INSTEAD OF Morgan, drove with the *mozo* to the market. "Today you can take my place," Morgan said, and stood at the gate to see them off. The car stopped almost as soon as it started, to pick up Lalia, who waited for the bus, singing, in front

of the house next door. Then the three went on together, two who spoke Spanish and one who spoke none.

That afternoon Stevie, dressed in a caftan of her mother's, washed all her clothes and spread them on the terrace, where they dried flat like poorly cut dresses of a paper doll.

"Seven-thirty," Morgan had reminded her daughter, but at eight o'clock, long after the six Americans and two English, the Frenchman and the Danes, had gathered in the *sala*, Stevie was still upstairs. Morgan invented things to say to the guests. My daughter is ill. You are not the sort of people that interest her. She washed her clothes and they're still wet. Instead, she asked Carlos to knock on Stevie's door.

Five minutes later the girl appeared and lights burned brighter of their own accord. The guests turned. Morgan turned. Stevie came toward them.

At first Morgan thought she was seeing an apparition, one who had pale gold hair with blue ribbons in it. Where had all this come from? The narrow white skirt that hung straight to white-sandaled feet. The fitted top, cut so low it barely contained Stevie's high young breasts.

From the bedroom window of the house next door Lalia reported the party to Fliss. The long windows of Morgan's *sala* revealed the guests moving about, and all through the moonlit evening there was activity on the terrace. The gentlemen, one at a time, took Stevie outside and, each according to the degree of his longing, kissed her.

Lalia described all this to Fliss, who lay against three pillows on the bed.

"That is the dress from the shop at the market. Those are the ribbons we found. The eyes and the ribbons, the same blue. Now Estefania is outside with one of the American husbands," Lalia went on. "Now with an English. She is back in the

sala again, standing next to her mother. Two beautiful women, one young, one a bit older. Carlos is passing wine and pastries on a tray. He is serving Estefania again and looking at her dress. The Danish gentleman has come up to lead her to the terrace. He is kissing her hands, her neck, her eyes. He loves her."

"How do you know that?" Fliss said.

Lalia made a correction. "He tells her he loves her."

"Go on," Fliss said.

The party ended at midnight. Half an hour later Morgan and her daughter, with a wall between them, lay in their beds, ringed about by the rainbow of splintered glass that topped the wall.

In an unfamiliar room, on an unaccustomed bed, Mor-



gan waited for sleep. For an hour she listened to the night. Wind on the magnolia leaves, an owl, a frog, and once, from the zoo, the distant protest of the lion. She was still awake when Carlos entered the house. She heard the watchman's whistle and soon after that the *mozo's* familiar footstep on the stairs. She held her breath in the silence that followed. Then the door of the large bedroom opened and closed. Morgan suffered a brief attack of lunacy. He has made a mistake, he has forgotten, he believes I am there in my bed.

Returned, seconds later, to sanity, she heard, in this order, Stevie's light cry of surprise, the *mozo's* reassurance, laughter, silence, a gasp, laughter again, a long silence. The bedsprings creaked. Stevie spoke. The carved mermaids knocked against the tapestried wall and knocked again.

Morgan covered her ears with pillows.

"HOW DID YOU SLEEP?" THEY ASKED EACH other at breakfast.

"Perfectly," they both said.

They passed butter and spoke of the fine day. Stevie spooned honey onto her toast. "My bus leaves at two," she said.

"Carlos will drive you to meet it."

Sun slanted the length of the table. Morgan saw everything turn gold, the tangerines in a bowl, the toast, the honey, her daughter's hair and skin. Time telescoped. Stevie could have been eight years old, golden, forgivable.

On the same wide panel of sunlight Carlos entered the room from the terrace. His long shadow fell across the plates and cups as he greeted first mother, then daughter. The day was beginning without confusion, without tears, like any other.

"The señorita's bus will leave at two," Morgan said.

Carlos immediately offered an invitation. "Then that will allow time for you to witness a mass in the most historic chapel of Santa Felicia. My family is sponsoring the service."

Morgan's silence extended so long that he understood it to mean consent.

"In that case, señora, would you be kind enough to bring your camera? For a few pictures."

So it came about that at twelve o'clock Carlos drove mother and daughter to his infant's christening.

The chapel was pink and old and streaked by recent storms. Carlos led Morgan toward the small crowd gathered at its arched entrance. Stevie followed, saw Lalia, and waved. A woman, grown thick at the waist with bread and rice and pregnancies, stepped forward.

"My wife," Carlos said. He pointed to three small boys at her side. "My sons." They were grave replicas of Carlos, graduated in size.

Now here was Goya, wearing high-heeled pumps and

a lace mantilla. A baby with skin the color of cambric tea was sucking its fist in the curve of her arm.

"Imagine it, señora," Carlos said. "This baptism and my mother's birthday all at one time." He gazed into the worn face of his parent. "She has completed forty-five years today."

My God, Morgan exclaimed in silence. That old woman and I are the same age.

After the mass Morgan took pictures of mother and child, father and child, grandmother and child. Of the three sons and a street dog that wandered into range by mistake.

"Now you," everyone said to her, and Stevie caught her mother holding the baby with Carlos at her side.

"One of us all together," they finally demanded.

Morgan had to cross the street to include everyone. She focused her lens and waited while a hunchback begged from the christening party. Trucks and bicycles passed. As she lifted her camera, she was shoved from behind by a lottery-ticket vendor. A sparrow of a child tugged at her skirt. Across the street hands waved and faces smiled. Morgan believed she saw the lovely, hapless infant smile.

At the instant she pressed the shutter, a legless man seated on a child's wagon propelled himself into the foreground and was included in the group. Then a military van stopped in front of her, and she took quick, repeated shots of its brown and battered side until the film ran out.

Stevie's bus left three hours late. It was after five when Carlos drove Morgan up the hill. As they passed the zoo, she turned toward the cages. She had time to see only the aviary, where a few listless herons pecked at a water trough and moulting macaws dropped their indigo and scarlet feathers on the dust.

But Carlos had news. "A new manager is coming to the zoological garden," he said. "A person of experience. A Swiss."

He turned to look at his employer, who said only, "Good," and kept her eyes on the road.

As they climbed the hill, Morgan observed the cloudless sky and for the first time was conscious of Mexican evening light, the clarity of insect, leaf, and pebble.

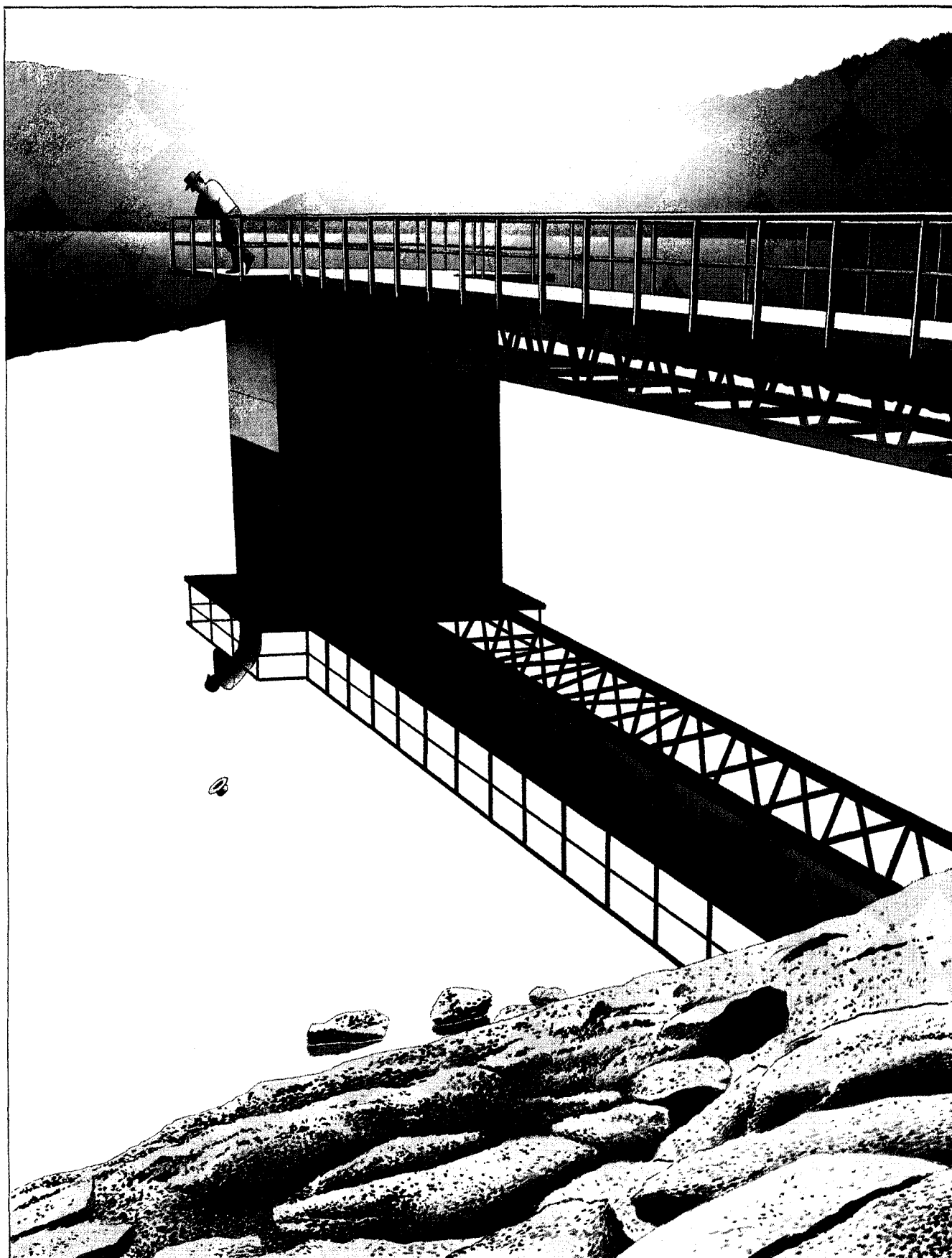
Carlos noticed it too. From the top of the grade he pointed down to the plaza of Santa Felicia and advised Morgan to examine the panorama from her room.

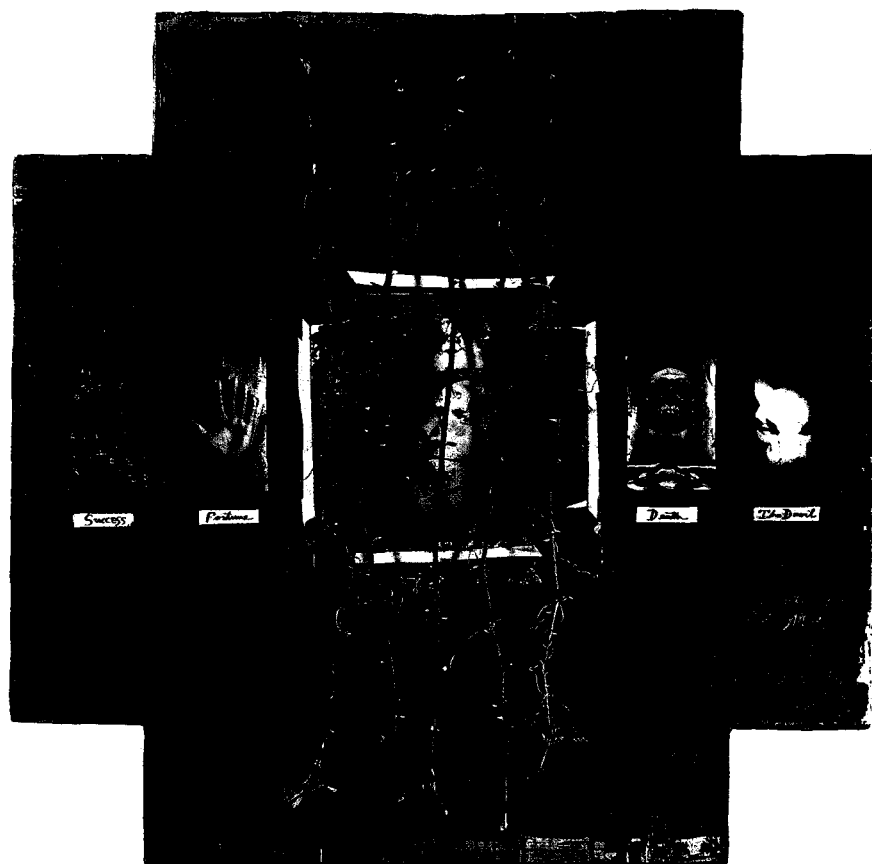
"Consider this, señora," he said. "On a day like today you can tell from here what kind of ice cream the vendor is selling. You can see the banker's polished shoes and the blind man's patch. From as far away as your house you can watch the big hand move on the cathedral clock. You can count the coins that fall into the beggar's hand."

Accordingly, Morgan went directly upstairs. She dropped her camera on the mermaid bed, glanced without mercy into the tin-framed mirror, and, as Carlos had suggested, crossed to the window to consider the view. □

THE OTHER SIDE

BY GUY BILLOUT





Blues Walking Like a Man

The complicated legacy of Robert Johnson

by Francis Davis

HERE ARE TWO CONSECUTIVE verses from Robert Johnson's blues "From Four Till Late":

From Memphis to Norfolk is a thirty-six hours' ride.

[repeat]

A man is like a prisoner, and he's never satisfied.

A woman is like a dresser, some man always ramblin' [through] its drawers.

[repeat]

It cause so many men [to] wear an apron overall.

That sums up Johnson: an expression of angst followed by a double en-

tendre; the first verse an artist's pronouncement on life as a life sentence, the second an example of the sort of verbal moonshine that Johnson—a Delta bluesman, not a Left Bank existentialist—must have routinely served up in the Mississippi "jook" houses where he practiced his art.

"From Four Till Late," which was recorded in 1937, is included on *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings* (Columbia 46222), a three-LP set also available on two cassettes or two compact discs, which was last year's most unlikely pop phenomenon. Presumably appealing to record buyers who aren't usually interested in either new

blues releases or reissues of any sort, Johnson's *Complete Recordings* has already sold in excess of 325,000 copies since its release last August—enough for it to be certified gold. In contrast, Johnson's raunchy "Terraplane Blues," recorded in 1936 and his only hit during his lifetime, sold just 4,000 copies upon its initial release and was distributed only in the South.

Johnson's sales last year can be seen as part of a trend. Reawakened interest in "roots music" has made semi-stars of Robert Cray and Los Lobos, swept John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, revived the careers of the Neville Brothers, Eric Clapton, Etta James, and Bonnie Raitt, and filled the stores with reissues of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. But Johnson's unexpected success can also be seen as the latest chapter in a mystery that has resisted easy resolution for more than half a century. The literature on Johnson, which is already voluminous and is still piling up, reads like a continuous detective novel, with Johnson—who is believed to have been born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, in 1911, and to have been fatally poisoned by a jealous husband after playing a country dance in Three Forks, near Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1938—as the missing person whose trail leads everywhere but to himself.

In the 1940s, for example, the search for information about Johnson, conducted by early blues historians going door to door asking black Mississippians what they knew about him, led to the discovery of Muddy Waters, who was still working as a field hand on a Mississippi plantation when he made his first recordings, for the Library of Congress, and to the rediscovery of Son House, one of the elder bluesmen assumed to have influenced Johnson. But Johnson himself seemed to have died without leaving a trace. The historians couldn't even be sure of the name of the man they were asking about. They eventually discovered that Johnson had been born out of wedlock to a woman whose first husband (the father of her ten other children), after narrowly avoiding the noose in Hazlehurst, had changed his last name from Dodds to Spencer and started a new life for himself and his family in Memphis. Johnson went by both those names at various times, as well as that of his natural father, but

Robert Johnson studio portrait, circa 1935 © Stephen LaVere 1989

never that of his mother (Major) or of her second husband (Willis).

To further complicate matters, Don Law, Johnson's record producer, misinterpreting Johnson's guardedness around white people as naiveté, spread the story that Johnson had spent his entire life on a Mississippi plantation, leaving it only to record sixteen of his songs in a makeshift studio in San Antonio, Texas, in November of 1936, and another thirteen of them in Dallas the following June. These are the twenty-nine songs on the Columbia reissue, which also includes twelve rather superfluous alternate takes.

In fact Johnson was a nomad, whose aversion to farm work had been a source of conflict between him and his stepfather, Dusty Willis. By the time he recorded, Johnson had hopped box-cars or thumbed his way all around the Mississippi Delta and to cities as far away as Chicago and New York, earning his living solely through music. Twice legally married, Johnson was a ladies' man to whom women "were like motel or hotel rooms," in the words of Johnny Shines, another blues performer, who frequently traveled with him and later recounted his years with Johnson to several writers. Upon arriving in a new town, Shines said, Johnson would attach himself to an older woman, who he figured would be grateful for the attention, or to a homely young girl, for whom there would likely be no competition.

He must have chosen the wrong woman in Three Forks. His death certificate, finally discovered by the blues historian Gayle Dean Wardlow in 1968, lists no cause of death, but supposed eyewitnesses have said that Johnson died after drinking whiskey laced with strychnine. We can probably discount the story repeated by many that he crawled on his hands and knees and barked like a dog for days before he died.

Two photographs, located years after Johnson's death, show us what he looked like. In one of them, used as the cover for *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings*, he looks impossibly young and optimistic in a natty pinstripe suit and a hat tilted at a jaunty angle, pitchfork fingers forming chords on his guitar. In the other, cropped for the accompanying booklet, he is heavy-lidded, ageless, and hard, a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

We now have an inkling of the broad outlines of Johnson's life, thanks to the efforts of Wardlow and others, including Alan Lomax, Sam Charters, Mack McCormick, David Evans, Robert Palmer, and Stephen Calt. The list also includes Peter Guralnick, whose *Searching for Robert Johnson* is probably the most reliable Johnson primer; and Steve LaVere, who co-produced the Columbia reissue, wrote the informative if wide-eyed liner notes for it, and grievously overdid the southern dialect in transcribing Johnson's lyrics.

DESPITE THE valuable findings of these historians, we still lack an explanation for Johnson's art. With most blues performers of his era, it's enough to acknowledge a folk tradition in which verses and even entire songs, including the guitar parts, reappear so frequently that the question of individual authorship sometimes becomes moot. Most of Johnson's songs can be traced to sources such as Tommy Johnson and Lonnie Johnson (no relation to each other or to Robert), Charley Patton, Son House, Skip James, Big Bill Broonzy, Leroy Carr, Texas Alexander, Hambone Willie Newbern, Kokomo Arnold, and Peetie Wheatstraw, all of whom Johnson conceivably heard in person or on record. But Johnson so successfully makes even his slightest and most derivative songs sound like personal emanations that it becomes necessary to speculate on his inner life, and this is where we draw a blank.

On a strictly musical level, Johnson's appeal lies in the tension between his raw vocals and a sophisticated guitar technique that enabled him to make good on his boast to Johnny Shines that he could play anything a pianist could, including boogie-woogie bass lines. "His guitar seemed to talk—repeat and say words with him like no one else in the world could," Shines once marveled, and there is a lucid example of Johnson's doing just that—using his guitar as an equal, contrapuntal voice—in "Come on in My Kitchen," a seduction blues in which sex is understood as equivalent to shelter, both for Johnson and for the woman he's trying to lure in from the rain.

But Johnson's lyrics are the real source of his power to transcend his own time and place, and so much has been read into them over the decades

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**RACE
AND POLITICS**
by Thomas Byrne Edsall

When Americans talk about government spending, about welfare, about crime, about unemployment, and about values, they are to some degree also talking about race. Race, the author writes, is the subtext of American politics: "Race helps define liberal and conservative ideologies, shapes the presidential coalitions of the Democratic and Republican parties, provides a harsh new dimension to concern over taxes and crime, drives a wedge through alliances of the working classes and the poor, and gives both momentum and vitality to the drive to establish a national majority inclined by income and demography to support policies benefiting the affluent and the upper-middle class."



**CAN POETRY
MATTER?**
by Dana Gioia

Never before have so many books of poetry been published each year in America. And never before has poetry mattered so little to the average reader. Why?

that it is now virtually impossible to listen to his songs, whether for the first time or for the thousandth, without hearing Johnson's legend singing and playing guitar along with him. The crux of that legend—apparently accepted as gospel by some of Johnson's contemporaries, and by Johnson himself, according to some accounts—is that he sold his soul to the devil, presumably at the stroke of midnight at the crossroads of two highways, in exchange for speed and agility on guitar. This is supposed to be the subject matter of Johnson's "Cross Road Blues," in which he begs "the Lord above" to "have mercy now, save poor Bob if you please."

In a black folk culture in which Christian and voodoo superstitions reinforced each other, Johnson had a number of traits that might have been seen as demonic: he had a cataract in one eye; he often played with his back turned to other musicians, which some of them took as proof that he had something to hide (he probably wanted to prevent them from copying his fingerings); and he favored unusual tunings ("You go to where . . . a crossroads is," LeDell Johnson, the brother of Tommy Johnson, another bluesman supposed to have entered into an unholy pact, told David Evans. "A big black man will walk up there and take your guitar, and he'll tune it").

Devil imagery abounded in the blues of Johnson's forebears, and Pee-wee Wheatstraw even billed himself as "The Devil's Son in Law" and "The High Sheriff From Hell." The notion that a performer is evil incarnate evidently titillated 1930s blues audiences as much as it does the audiences for rap and heavy metal today. Also, the rumor that a man had Satan on his side probably amounted to a form of protection against some of the rough customers who assembled in the backwoods gambling dens in which the blues used to be played, many of whom regarded musicians as pampered dandies out to steal their women.

Still, this doesn't completely explain

away Johnson's lyrics, because the intensity with which he delivers them can give you an existential migraine. In *Shining Trumpets*, published in 1946, more than a decade before the first LP collection of Johnson's work and almost three decades before the publication of



his photographs, the jazz writer Rudi Blesh imagined Johnson to be "a lonely, ragged, be-deviled figure, bent to the wind, with his *easy rider* [guitar] held by one arm as it swings from its cord around his neck," and described his "Hell Hound on My Trail" as "full of evil, surcharged with the terror of

one alone among the moving, unseen shapes of the night."

More recently, Charles Shaar Murray, in *Crosstown Traffic*, his entertainingly discursive biography of Jimi Hendrix, wrote of Johnson, "His songs dwell in realms of existential terror where he and the devil walk side by side [in 'Me and the Devil Blues,' in which he vows 'to beat my woman until I get satisfied'], where stones are forever in his pathway ['Stones in My Passway'], where he is both consumed by lust and stricken with impotence [in 'Dead Shrimp Blues,' for example, although he's just temporarily exhausted from too much 'barbecuein' the bone'], where the blues comes walking like a man ['Preaching Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)'] or falling down like hail ['Hell Hound on My Trail']."

Blesh's and Murray's overheated prose captures the exact temperature of Johnson's satanic verses. But this was only one side of Johnson. Listening to him sing any of the above-mentioned songs—or "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day," in which he declares that if he did, "the little woman I'm lovin' wouldn't have no right to pray," a wish you might expect to hear from one of the psychotic narrators of Jim Thompson's brutal 1950s pulp novels—it's difficult to imagine the same man ebulliently boasting that "the stuff I got'll bust your brains out . . . it'll make you lose your mind" (in "Stop Breakin' Down Blues") or tell-

ing his woman that she "can squeeze my lemon 'til the juice runs down my leg" (in "Traveling Riverside Blues"—yes, this is where Led Zeppelin got the conceit).

It's also difficult to imagine him stretching out his songs, adding verses to them on the spur of the moment, as he did to the delight of the crapshooters and belly-rubbing dancers in the jooks. And Johnny Shines tells us that Johnson, when playing for money on southern street corners, was as likely to honor a request for "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" or a Bing Crosby song or a current jazz hit as he was to sing one of his own songs. *The Complete Recordings* gives us a hint of what he must have sounded like doing this, in "They're Red Hot," an amiable piece of jive that reportedly Johnson learned from his brother, although it could pass for a Fats Waller number. It's a real anomaly, which many of the blues fans I know disdain. But it fascinates me, maybe because I like Waller so much, or maybe because it's a piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit.

Another point worth considering in relationship to Johnson's driven imagery was raised by Vernon Reid, the guitarist in the black hard-rock band Living Colour, who said, in a recent issue of *Musician*, "People talk about the dread in Robert Johnson as existential, but you've got to look at it in social terms, too." *Blues in the Mississippi Night* (Rykodisc RCD-90155), a CD-only reissue of a remarkable 1946 session produced by Alan Lomax, features Big Bill Broonzy's, Sonny Boy Williamson's, and Memphis Slim's sometimes comic but more often chilling spoken recollections of what life was like for southern blacks in the first half of this century in the lumber and levee camps, the prison farms, and the plantations on which, as Broonzy observes, "a Negro didn't mean no more to a white man than a mule." It reinforces Reid's contention that the hounds Johnson was trying to stay one step ahead of may not have been entirely metaphorical. The recollections might also help to explain why no one ever seems to have been

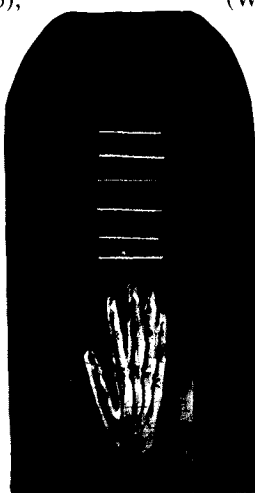
arrested for Johnson's murder. "If you were a good worker, you could kill anybody down there," Memphis Slim remembers at one point, "so long as he's colored. [Just] don't kill a good worker."

THERE IS disagreement over where Johnson is buried: in an unmarked plot in the far corner of the graveyard of Mt. Zion Church in Morgan City, near Three Forks, as stated on his death certificate; or in another unmarked grave, next to a jagged tree stump, in the churchyard of Payne Chapel in Quito, Mississippi. There is disagreement about Johnson's legacy, too. Billed as "King of the Delta Blues Singers" on the 1961 LP collection that made my generation aware of him, he was recently hailed as "The Father of Rock and Roll" on the cover of the same issue of *Musician* in which Reid was quoted, presumably because Cream and the Rolling Stones recorded famous versions of his "Cross Roads Blues" and "Love in Vain," respectively, and because his walking bass lines show up, several times removed, in most boogie guitar shuffles.

But to call Johnson a progenitor of rock-and-roll is as meaningless as comparing him to Sartre and Camus, as some writers in fact have. Both amount to cultural gerrymandering that inadvertently relegates Johnson's cultural milieu to second-class importance.

(When are rock critics going to stop announcing to the world that the likes of Johnson, Mozart, and Cole Porter were rock-and-rollers but just didn't know it?) Johnson never found much favor with black record buyers of his own day. His reputation rests on his appeal to British rockers and white American intellectuals. Last year, in an issue of *Living Blues* largely devoted to the question of Johnson's role in the evolution of the blues,

Ron Weinstock correctly observed that "the frequency with which rock artists have recorded Johnson songs . . . lacks relevance to [his] status in blues history. . . . It doesn't mean Johnson was a significant influence on blues performers."



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Caves, Crusades, and Cassoulet

The other south of France: Languedoc and French Catalonia

by Peter Davison

DESPITE THE LONG, nostalgic history of Americans in Paris, there are whole regions of France that Yankees never think to visit and that even Parisians seldom talk about. One of these is among the oldest regions in all Europe, in terms of human habitation; nonetheless, the French haven't yet settled on one name for it. The region I shall vaguely refer to as Languedoc is bounded by the Mediterranean on the east, the Pyrenees on the south, the tiny Catalan principality of Andorra to the west, and the Lot River on the north. This land of cave paintings, Romanesque abbeys, fortified cities, ruined castles, unbelievable landscape, a complex and bloody history, and a rich menu of table delicacies has an excess of

neither population nor tourism. To travel here is like traveling to another country altogether, not France and not Spain.

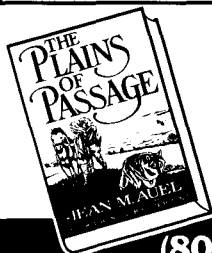
Much the same region, 35,000 years ago, harbored Cro-Magnon man, whose remains were discovered among the mountains of succulent limestone, underground rivers, and steep valleys honeycombed with the caves (Altamira, Aurignac, Lascaux, Niaux, and so on) that gave our ancestors shelter and places for ritual and celebration. Languedoc emerged from the ancient and prosperous Roman province anchored by the thriving Mediterranean harbor of Narbonne (Latin: Narbo). The area became one of those historical shuttlecocks, like the Low Countries, batted between larger, cruder po-

litical entities (Toulouse, Aragon, France, the papacy) and oppressed by the overlordship of its neighbors. In the Middle Ages it developed the tongue—"langue d'oc"—that linguists have come to call Occitan, and it rejoined in a white-limestone landscape that swarmed with sheep until the herbage was chewed off the hilltops. Undermined by improvident agronomy and inattentive government, bled white by wars of religion, depopulated by genocide, ravaged by the greed of outsiders, it became what it is today: peaceful, productive, underpopulated.

Languedoc was also the land of the Cathars (the "Pure"), sheltering for a long, passionate swath of the Middle Ages an exotic form of Manichean reli-

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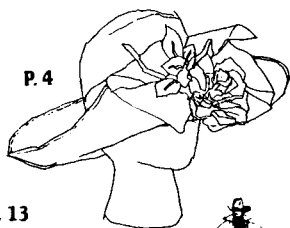
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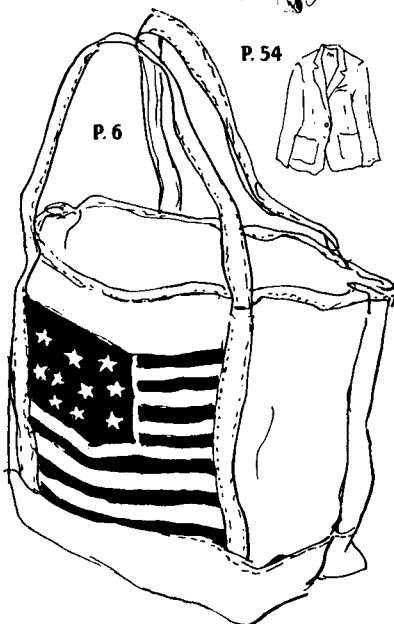
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gion. This strange creed of the common people used the demotic Occitan liturgically instead of Latin and eschewed the structures and authority of the Church in favor of specially chosen male and female priestlike leaders. It would take all the secular powers of the papacy and the kingdom of France to extirpate what they called the Albigensian heresy. Innocent III preached a Crusade beginning in 1208, and under the leadership of the notorious Simon de Montfort thousands of inhabitants of Béziers, Carcassonne, Albi, and Minerve—Cathars and Christians alike—were slaughtered or imprisoned. This land grab by the French took several decades: the last Cathar military stronghold surrendered in 1255, and even then shoots of Albigensianism kept sprouting, so the Church devised the Inquisition, first practiced here, to subdue them, which took another hundred years. (In the meantime Catalonia, in the south, suffered under the dynasties of Barcelona, Aragon, and Majorca, not to rejoin France until 1493.) It is not surprising, then, that the erstwhile country of the Cathars greeted the coming of the Reformation, in the sixteenth century, with a flowering of Protestantism and celebrated the French Revolution, in 1789, with an impassioned destruction of ecclesiastical buildings and art.

Most of Languedoc is peppered with villages dominated by fortified churches, soaring Romanesque abbeys tucked away for safety in exotic locations, and wild, craggy castles where the doomed Cathars held out to the end. It revels in such potations as the anise-flavored *pastis* and heady red wine, and food as savory as the wild herbs—rosemary, thyme, lavender, bay—that flourish in its meadows: *langoustes*, *bourrides*, and *brandade de morue* along the shore, and belly-filling casseroles based on rabbit and boar and duck and goose, peaches and melons and apricots, truffles and chestnuts and walnuts, in the uplands.

Languedoc, especially its southern sections, and Catalonia flourish today as wine country. The grapes for more than half of all the drinkable wine of France are grown here, and those for a lot of the undrinkable as well. Even the best of the wine is not expensive, which cannot be said for many French pleasures these days.

I DROVE A car in a thousand-kilometer arc from Montpellier to Brive westward along the Pyrenees and then north with my wife and two other friends, one of whom is an art historian with a passion for Romanesque churches. We were deposited at Montpellier by the *très grande vitesse* express that had departed Paris at ten in the morning and left us at the gates of Languedoc at three in the afternoon, with plenty of time to reach Narbonne by car and rest up before dinner at a three-star restaurant. (Narbonne, by the way, fell apart as a prosperous city when the papacy, in one of its self-destructive gestures at self-purification, made the great mistake of expelling the Jews from the city in 1306. Within fifty years the harbor had silted up and the great university had closed down. Narbonne now lies high, dry, and beautiful.)

Southerly from Narbonne along the sea unsightly vacation communities stretch for 100 kilometers, all the way to the Spanish border. Still, to the north Sète (the birthplace of Paul Valéry and the site of his most famous poem, "*Le Cimetière marin*") and to the south the Catalan fishing village of Collioure (a favorite haunt of Matisse and other Fauvist painters before the First World War) are worth an attempt if the season is right; and the coastal *étangs*, or lagoons, offer plenty of birds for those watchers who have life lists to enlarge. Our route from Narbonne took us toward the sea to the Cistercian abbey at Fontfroide, hidden at the throat of a valley that water had carved out of limestone, its surrounding hills swathed with the gray brush locally called *garrigue*, studded with cypresses and pines, and tiered with Italian gardens. The abbey boasts a lovely cloister, to which long staircases conducted the monks down from their dormitories to business in the chapter room or services in the abbey church or farm work in the fields. Only a mile or two away lie the ruins of an Albigensian castle, confronting its ancient enemy from a hilltop.

We drove on by the shore of one of the *étangs* that saltily protect the coast, gulls and egrets flapping through the stiff breezes that blew foam in from the sea, until we veered from the coast at Perpignan and ascended westward and southward into the foothills of the Pyrenees toward Catalan Prades, where for seventeen years Pablo Casals, outraged

by the Franco regime in Spain, exiled himself from fascism and played Bach and Mozart, almost within earshot of the Spanish border, with that Catalan intensity that made him the most famous cellist of our century.

Our destination was Molitg-les-Bains (that unsightly Catalan word is pronounced *moleech*), a mountain village with several hotels built around thermal baths. Ours, the Château de Riell, stood high, displaying distant views in every direction, swimming pools on the roof and in the garden, lovely terraces, cypresses as soft and slender as plumes, and somewhat feverish overdecoration (for example, tiger skin on the walls of the barroom, ranges of copper washstands in the bathrooms). The polylingual clientele lounged by the pools, all reading the same American meganovels in varied translations. The food was good but expensive, and the maître d'hôtel presented it condescendingly, stimulating us to try other meals in other restaurants. Still, it's worth mentioning a carpaccio of raw salmon with a fan of sliced vegetables, a baby rabbit stuffed with herbs, and a whole melon scooped out and filled with the fruits of the season: melon, peaches, apples, pears, and nectarines. The château gave us a base of operations for exploring the ecclesiastical architecture of the Canigou Massif, beginning with St. Michel-de-Cuxa, the half-destroyed abbey where an annual Casals festival is now held—and which, many years ago, provided building materials for The Cloisters, in New York City. This huge Benedictine abbey, like so many churches in the region, was for ages a stopping place for pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela, in western Spain. Cuxa was wrecked—and, no doubt, its lands confiscated—by fervent anticlericals during the French Revolution, and parts of its masonry have only lately been rescued from blasphemous misuses in Prades and even farther away (The Cloisters remain unthreatened). As we filed through the ambulatory, a pianist left over from the festival sat playing Brahms intermezzi in the transept.

We spent afternoons walking along valley trails near a perfect little hill town called Mosset, through irrigated orchards and along a plashy stream or, more adventurously, upward on a steep

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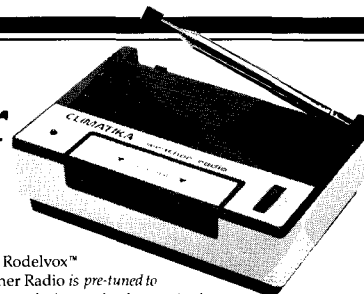
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The politicians have not yet heard. In the midst of twin crises over Kuwait and the budget deficit last autumn, Congress took time out to pass—and the President signed—a new law which will raise immigration about 50 per cent in coming years. It will pose new budgetary strains, particularly on the hard pressed cities. American fertility has risen, and a population increase of 25 million during the 'nineties was already on the way. If Congress had stopped to think, we wonder if it would have increased our energy needs by adding millions more.

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road along a mountain ridge through wild meadows scented with herbs, patrolled by goshawks, the crushed rock of the Pyrenees crackling underfoot and blackberries festooning every bush. Later we drove a few miles to a walled medieval town, Villefranche-de-Conflent. Here for the first time we encountered French vacationers in droves, but we also found wonderful rich Catalan wines to sample in the Caves des Templiers, charming items to buy in many tiny shops, and a good meal in an outdoor restaurant inside the town walls.

This had been a scouting expedition for another Romanesque excursion: the ascent to a monastery above Vernet-les-Bains, a resort town favored by Rudyard Kipling and Hilaire Belloc, among other mountain-loving literary worthies of a century ago. Belloc, who once apostrophized of "the fleas that tease in the High Pyrenees / And the wine that tasted of the tar," also walked over the mountains and the plains to achieve a book called *The Path to Rome*. Above Vernet lies one of the most beautiful of all Romanesque sites, St. Martin-du-Canigou, which in Belloc's day still lay in ruins but which has been recently restored. I climbed up the winding mountain road a mile or two in the cool early air. When the jeep brought the rest of my party up the switchback road—a ride that left them quivering—we were conducted (in total and merciful silence) through the monastery. Built between the ninth and eleventh centuries, perched on a crag, and now used mostly for retreats, it looks up and over the mountains of the Massif du Canigou. We ended our tour through cloisters and crypts in the tiny church, where a mass was just beginning. We reluctantly left the plainsong behind, strolling down the mountain while the noontime shift of pilgrims strode manfully and sweating upward toward St. Martin.

IT TOOK SEVEN fatiguing hours of driving to reach Toulouse from Vernet, stitching our way up the French-Spanish border along the ridge of the Pyrenees on slow and winding truck-jammed roads, ascending toward the crest at Mont-Louis, a Vauban fortress that also boasts of recent pioneering ventures in solar power collecting. We made our way through beautiful upland pastures teeming with beige

cattle, and then, after penetrating a vestigial Spanish enclave named Lliuvia, which was left over from the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees, settling the border between France and Spain, turned northward into France. Here the mountains were grim and barren, and at last we made our way swiftly down the slope of the Pyrenees toward Niaux, where we had planned (but not far enough in advance, it seems: reservations are required) to see some of the prehistoric wall paintings in the caves.

We sped toward Toulouse, past Disneyland-like Foix, along the valley of the Ariège as it joins the Garonne, and we gratefully welcomed rest in the extremely comfortable Grand Hôtel de l'Opéra, in the center of Toulouse. The hotel's widely celebrated restaurant (one of whose great specialties is tiny ravioli stuffed with raw foie gras) was closed, but in the grill it was perfectly possible to obtain such regional specialties as first-class *cassoulet toulousain*, that amazingly flavorful bean stew with goose preserved in its own fat, and *magret de canard*, which my companions took for steak, only to be instructed by a droll waiter that the ducks of Toulouse were so robust, having lived out their lives on a diet of cassoulet, that their breasts were thick as sirloins, and as lean and delicious. It was duck gone to heaven.

Toulouse protected the Cathars during their persecution—at least for a while. Yet after the rebels had been put down, Toulouse became one of the centers where the Church drew itself up to display its triumphant orthodoxy. Saint Sernin, to whom Toulouse's most striking basilica is dedicated, was martyred by a bull who dragged him, to whatever purpose, through the main street of town. His memorial is vast and beautiful, a Romanesque masterpiece built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with a pointed octagonal Gothic tower constructed over a crypt full of austere and tender sculpture. The strange, two-naved thirteenth-century Gothic convent of Les Jacobins was specifically founded to counteract the Cathars. Its brilliantly painted vaulting and central row of columns is unlike the interior of any other church I have ever seen. The Augustins Museum has as huge a collection of Romanesque capitals, collected from ruined churches, as one could tolerate, beautifully lit but mystifyingly

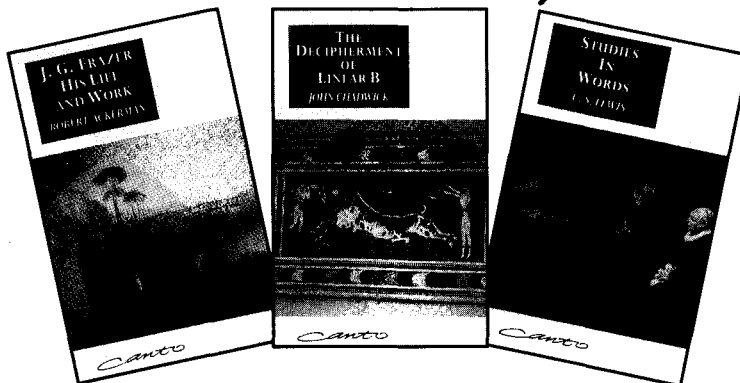
mounted on great rusty iron stands that resemble stacked bayonets.

The churches are studded around the old city, the former capital of all that lay between the Garonne and the Rhône as far south as the Pyrenees regions of Catalonia and Aragon. Today Toulouse is a place of red bricks and Roman roof tiles, at whose center lies a vast square. Along one side stands Le Capitole, built of brick during the most restrained and classic mood of the eighteenth century and the largest Baroque monument north of the Pyrenees. The cafés and brasseries overlooking the great square share an Italian mood that evokes Piazza Navona, in Rome, or San Marco, in Venice. Greater Toulouse, a metropolis of half a million, contains the oldest university in France after that of Paris—and forms the center of the French aeronautical industry. It displays the gaiety of any city where the population is younger than average, alive, vivid, exciting. Our room opened onto a pedestrian street, the rue des Changes, where we heard the murmurs of walkers and children by day and the roistering of revelers by night—just what one wants in a well-regulated city instead of the fuming of buses and the grinding of traffic.

On our last evening in Toulouse we sought out a highly recommended restaurant, Darroze, where we encountered the best meal we had in Languedoc, featuring tartare of tuna, grilled salmon, a pigeon casserole with green cabbage, and poached pears with raspberry *coulis*, accompanied by first-class wines from Gaillac (white) and Cahors (red). After our last night in the hotel, with its bright-blue velvet sofas and its cerise-colored barroom, we made our way out of the city through what turned out to be a weekly Sunday market, jammed into the streets around St. Sernin. The crowds forced us to drive our car on the sidewalk. As we reached the corner that would set us free from the stalls selling apricots and old clothing, figs and tablecloths, I made a *very* careful right turn to avoid a baby stroller at my left front wheel—which produced a noisy scrape on my car's right side against the railing around a well-filled café. The tiny collision was cheered by tables full of men sipping a wake-up Armagnac: "*Vous avez gagné!*" Yes, I guess we had won: we had left our mark on the country with no name. □

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Books

The Unread Giant

by Gordon A. Craig

GOETHE: THE POET AND THE AGE
Volume 1: The Poetry of
Desire (1749–1790)
by Nicholas Boyle.
Oxford University Press, \$37.50.

IN APRIL OF 1984 the Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit* arranged with leading newspapers in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy to conduct polls among their readers to determine the ten most important European writers. The only condition imposed was that the respondents could not vote for writers of their own nationality. Thus the French could not vote for Rousseau or Racine, the Italians for Boccaccio or Manzoni. When the votes were tallied, Shakespeare, not surprisingly, had four first-place votes out of five, the highest possible score. In second place was Johann Wolfgang Goethe, with two second places, one third, and one fifth in the national polls, which placed him ahead of Cervantes and Dante, in third and fourth place, and Kafka, Proust, Thomas Mann, Molière, Joyce, and Dickens, who filled out the top ten.

Why did British, French, Spanish, and Italian readers automatically think of Goethe when asked about the great European writers? Certainly in part because of the remarkable variety and scope of his writings. Some years ago, when asked why so many German writers in the nineteenth century had turned to philosophy rather than other forms of writing, an English critic hazarded the view that it was because Goethe had used up everything else. He was Germany's greatest lyric poet and the author of some of its finest epic, narrative, and dramatic poetry as well. He was a dramatist of great power, whose plays included the historical dramas *Götz von Berlichingen of the Iron Hand*, set in the age of the Reforma-



tion, and *Egmont*, about the Dutch wars of liberation; the court drama *Torquato Tasso*, which dealt with the conflict between poetic genius and social convention; *The Natural Daughter*, a critical view of the French Revolution which, read today, seems like a chilling forewarning of twentieth-century totalitarianism; and his lifework and masterpiece, *Faust*.

His novels were equally remarkable. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was the first modern novel about the problems of the outsider in society; *Wilhelm Meister* the model for all future German *Bildungsromane*, or novels of development and self-improvement; and *The Elective Affinities*, in Thomas Mann's view, "the most daring and trenchant novel about adultery that the moral culture of the Occident ever produced." To this body of work must be added a wonderful travel book, *Italian Journey*, and an autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*, which for style and penetration is rivaled in German only by Bismarck's *Memories and Thoughts*, and which includes an impressive piece of historical reconstruction and reminiscence called *The Campaign in France*. Considering all this, and the fact that Goethe also wrote treatises on mineralogy, optics, and botany, the English comment cited above seems less jocular than upon first hearing.

An additional reason for Goethe's international renown may be that he is the least German of all the great German writers. In an address delivered in 1932 in Weimar, on the hundredth anniversary of the poet's death, Thomas Mann suggested that after the tremendous success of *Götz* and *Werther*, Goethe never again wrote anything (with the possible exception of the epic *Hermann und Dorothea*) that was a popular success in Germany, and that his dramas never touched the national heartstrings in the way that Schiller's did. Indeed, popular success was not something that Goethe strove for, and he opposed the cultivation of the essentially German consciously, deliberately, and pedagogically. Mann said,

His own mighty nature embraces the German and the Mediterranean,

the European and the national. And this combination is, in essence, the same as that other combination of genius and intellectualism; of mystery and clarity; of the deep chord and the polished word; of the lyrical and the psychological. He is the greatest of them all because he so happily unites the daemonic and the urbane in a way that is probably unique; and it is precisely this combination that has made him the darling of mankind.

It is doubtful whether this sweeping statement could be made to apply in the United States. True, Emerson wrote in *Representative Men* that whereas Shakespeare was the greatest poet, Goethe was the greatest writer, the most remarkable in reporting "the doings of the miraculous spirit of life that everywhere throbs and works." But he qualified this by adding,

I dare not say that Goethe ascended to the highest grounds from which genius has spoken. He has not worshipped the highest unity; he is incapable of a self-surrender to the moral sentiment. There are nobler strains in poetry than any he has sounded. There are writers poorer in talent, whose tone is purer, and more touches the heart. Goethe can never be dear to men.

Throughout the nineteenth century Goethe's reputation suffered from charges of immorality and irreligion; in our own century it has tended to erode because of bad translations, the remoteness of Goethe's world from our own, and the heavy demands that his major works make upon readers. It is not surprising that the American theater has failed to come to terms with him and that even the Faust drama is generally known only in Gounod's operatic setting of the Gretchen story. Similarly, only the earliest lyric poetry and ballads like "The Elf King" and "The Little Heath Rose" have become at all familiar in this country, and then only because they appear so frequently in song recitals. In 1983, when the distinguished Goethe scholar Katharina Mommsen published in English translation an excellent collection of excerpts from all of the poet's major works, she titled it *Who Is Goethe?* The answering silence becomes yearly more pronounced. In university education, if we put aside departments of German studies and comparative literature, exposure to Goethe takes place

only in freshman courses on Western culture, where students are likely to spend a week on either *Werther* or the first part of *Faust*. As the pressure for multicultural courses increases, that stronghold is likely to fall, and Goethe will disappear from general education, unless someone has the wit to make something of Goethe's own multicultural interests and introduce students to his imitations of Persian poetry.

NICHOLAS BOYLE may have been moved by some of these considerations when he embarked upon this new life of Goethe, which he describes as "start[ing] from first principles and assum[ing] as little prior knowledge of its subject as possible." He feels that two different needs may be met by the book: the reader who knows something about English or French literary history but is ignorant of the German language and literature and has only a sketchy knowledge of German history will find enough information in it "to set Goethe's life in the context of his age and his poetry in the context of his life"; and the reader already familiar with Goethe's works will benefit from having them presented in strictly chronological order against their biographical, socio-historical, and philosophical background. "For the specialist," Boyle writes,

there may emerge . . . a new view of a commanding literary presence: as a free man responding to the social, spiritual and intellectual demands of modernity, as they formulated themselves around him. For the non-specialist there is the promise of a new acquaintance: limited and even peculiar, no doubt, as we all are, but grand and deep and rich as none of us is and few of our forebears have been.

This first volume gives one good reason to believe that these objectives will be achieved. The book is perhaps too long (and certainly too heavy to read comfortably either in an easy chair or in bed), and because of Boyle's decision to alternate sections dealing with Goethe's life with others that deal mainly with his works, it tends to be annoyingly repetitious, since of course the life and the works cannot be separated, as Boyle acknowledges. But these faults are minor, and those who bear with them will be rewarded by a more convincing account than can be

found in any previous biographical study in English of Goethe's discovery of his self and his mission in life. That discovery came through a long process of emancipating himself from the religious and philosophical orthodoxies of his time, from the limitations that his early successes threatened to impose upon his genius, from the social conventions and class prejudices of the society in which he moved, from his own sexual confusions, and from the problem of determining who his audience should be.

In analyzing the internal strains of an age that moved from the reassuring certainties of the Leibnizian world order to the convulsive changes introduced by the French Revolution, and in relating Goethe's creative evolution to them, Boyle shows admirable skill, reinforced by the clarity and depth of his analysis of Goethe's work, which reaches a high point in Boyle's masterly readings of *Egmont* and *Torquato Tasso*. Notable also is his perceptive portrayal of the contrasting milieus in which Goethe moved—the bourgeois world of Frankfurt, in which he was born and from which he fled in 1775, and the hierarchical court society of Weimar, to which he gave ten years of his productive life before escaping to Italy. Not the least attractive feature of this book, finally, is its gallery of portraits of those representative figures of an age of great originals who played a significant role in Goethe's life and development: Johann Gottfried Herder, who, in a meeting in 1770 that was momentous for German literature, cleared Goethe's head of the clutter of old models and opened his vision for new sources of poetic inspiration; J. H. Merck, "a singular man," Goethe said in his memoirs, "who had the greatest influence on my life," an acerbic personality who edited *The Frankfurt Literary Advertiser*, who early recognized and encouraged Goethe's literary gifts, and who gave the decisive impetus not only to the publication of *Götz von Berlichingen* but also to Goethe's adoption of a literary career; Johann Caspar Lavater, the Zürich pastor and physiognomist, whom Goethe for a time admired but whose insistent piety unwittingly contributed to the extinguishing of the last vestiges of his religious faith; and Karl Philipp Moritz, the author of the psychological novel *Anton Reiser*, whose definition of art as the nearest

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What are the facts?

■ The concept of "land for peace" is a totally new one in the history of the world. It was formulated for one specific purpose only, namely to persuade and pressure Israel to give up territories that it has administered since the Six-Day War of 1967. By its victory in that war, Israel wound up in possession of these territories. Contrary to what many are led to believe, the "West Bank," the focus of today's attention, had never been part of any Arab country. It was part of Palestine, a territorial unit that, by the Mandate of the League of Nations and in line with the Balfour Declaration, had been designated as a national home for the Jewish people.

■ Thus, while the concept of "land for peace" is a brand-new one, the concept that to the victor belong the spoils is as old as history itself and had really never been questioned before the days of the Israel-Arab conflict. Our own country, of course, following its Manifest Destiny, has benefited greatly and has consolidated its territory by applying this motto. But Israel followed a different path. From the day of victory in 1967, it waited for an offer of peace from the Arabs. But that offer never came. Instead, immediately following the war, the Arabs pronounced their three unalterable "no's": no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.

■ In 1977, President Sadat of Egypt traveled to Jerusalem and presented a peace plan to the Israeli government. The Israelis eagerly embraced his suggestion. In exchange for peace and normalization of relations with its neighbor, Israel returned to Egypt the vast Sinai peninsula, together with the city of Yamit; some of the most advanced military installations in the world; the port and naval installations of Sharm-el-Sheik, which safeguard Israel's access to its port of Eilat;

and the oil fields that Israel had developed and which had made Israel self-sufficient in its energy requirements. And, of course, Israel also gave up the natural buffer against aggression that the Suez Canal and the strategic depth of the Sinai itself provided. It was a first in history. Never before in the chronicle of mankind had the victor returned conquered territory to the vanquished in order to attain peace.

■ One would expect that the concept of "land for peace" would work both ways. After all, should not the Arabs also make some territorial sacrifices for peace? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Every inch of land held by the Arabs is considered "holy Arab soil" and its possession by the "infidels" (Christians or Jews) is inadmissible, intolerable, a blasphemy and a case for "jihad" (holy war). No compromise, no concession is ever possible. The way the "Taba issue" was finally resolved further illustrates the Arab belief that the "land for peace" principle is basically a one-way street.

■ The "land for peace" formulation is now applied mostly to the Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza regions. Israel's foes, but also some of its friends, urge Israel to yield these regions to the Arabs, in exchange for "peace." But there is no peace, and no peace will come about by Israel's giving up this area of vital strategic importance to those who are its sworn enemies and who have declared over and over again that they wish to use this land as their launching pad for the final attempt at the destruction of Israel. The conflict in the area is not only between Israel and the "Palestinians." It is first of all between Israel and the Arab nations. With the single exception of Egypt, virtually all of them are still in a state of war with Israel.

To none of the Arab countries has the possibility ever occurred of *their* trading land for peace, for instance yielding the "West Bank" to Israel for the sake of peace. Not one of these countries has even hinted that they would make peace with Israel if Israel yielded the administered territories to the Arabs. There isn't even a gesture of accommodation, such as a lifting of the over 40-year-old Arab economic boycott against Israel, an apology for the odious slander that Zionism is Racism, or a discontinuation of the yearly charade in the United Nations, in which the Arab states attempt to expel Israel from that body. For the victor to yield land for peace to the vanquished is a new idea—who knows it might even be a good one. But it surely would have to work both ways in order to be valid and effective.

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thing to a religious activity allowed by a completely secularized world view helped Goethe, after he had returned from Italy, to discover a new role for himself as "artist" at the court at Weimar and thus, in Boyle's words, "to reconcile in himself the courtly and the middle-class elements in German culture by becoming a self-sufficient creator of literary beauty who was maintained by his patron but did not subserve any of his patron's purposes."

Perhaps more influential in shaping Goethe's career than any of these were the women in his life: Friederike Brion, Charlotte Kestner, Lili Schöne-mann, Charlotte von Stein, Faustina Antonini, and Christiana Vulpius. Since his earliest writings, Boyle observes, Goethe's art had required as impetus "an exceptionally powerful and unremitting desire for an adequate object, never completely identified, always more or less absent," and as his religious faith waned, the object of desire necessarily became this-worldly. When Goethe met Friederike Brion, the pastor's daughter in Sesenheim, his love for her was immediate and overwhelming and was expressed in an outburst of poetry that astounded and enchanted readers for generations. But it was a love that could find only literary fulfillment. Having been led to suppose that she was affianced to Goethe, Friederike was abandoned unceremoniously, to become, Boyle writes, "not merely a victim but, in her fate, a symbol of unrelenting desire"—and, of course, the subject of new literary exercises, a fact that horrified Rahel Varnhagen, who venerated Goethe but, after reading one of the Friederike poems composed after the break, wrote, "I sat with ice congealing on my heart. . . . And for the first time Goethe seemed hostile to me!" The affair with Friederike became a kind of model for those that followed, with Charlotte Kestner, who found herself immortalized as the heroine of *Werther*, a fate that she would certainly not have chosen for herself; Lili Schönmann, the daughter of a wealthy Frankfurt family, who was engaged to be married to Goethe until he broke off the relationship, in 1775; and Charlotte von Stein, his poetic inspiration during his first Weimar period. Herder called Goethe "the cold misogynist," a remark that Boyle finds cruel and "not quite correct," but full of insight, for

certainly Goethe could "love as few men could, but only at a distance, only in unfulfilment," since he feared that complete intimacy might lead to marriage, the hobbling of inspiration by material cares, and the end of poetry.

In going to Weimar, Goethe was intrigued by the possibility of giving guidance to the young duke Carl August and proving what a free individual could accomplish in the world of bureaucratic politics. There is no doubt that he was successful. In June of 1782 Herder wrote sourly,

So he is now Permanent Privy Councillor, President of the Chamber, President of the War Office, Inspector of Works down to roadbuilding, Director of Mines, also *Directeur des plaisirs*, Court Poet, composer of pretty festivities, court operas, ballets, cabaret masques, inscriptions, works of art etc., Director of the Drawing Academy in which during the winter he delivered lectures on osteology; everywhere himself the principal actor, dancer, in short, the factotum of all Weimar.

He had become, after the duke, the most powerful man in Weimar. But his writing was at a standstill, and his enthusiasm for science was in part a reaction to the fact that he could neither complete unfinished work nor launch new literary projects. As for the relationship with Frau von Stein, a pseudo-marriage without consummation, it was becoming intolerable. In September of 1786, without announcing his intentions, Goethe slipped away to Italy, where, with the forbearance and support of Carl August, he lived for the next two years.

In some ways the Italian journey was a disappointment. Goethe had embarked upon it in the hope that it would produce an outwelling of poetic creativity. It did so only to a limited degree: he was able to finish old projects, such as *Iphigenia on Tauris*, and *Egmont*, and *Torquato Tasso*, but his plan to write a new drama called *Ulysses Among the Phaeacians* came to nothing and was soon abandoned. On the other hand, it was in Italy that he discovered art and learned that it was more than an exercise in ego satisfaction, more than a poetry of desire. Boyle writes, "He had come looking for culmination, enjoyment, and a revelatory immediacy of experience, and he had found . . . the need for study, informed understand-

ing, and hard work." And Italy taught him also the pleasures of sexual gratification, through his relationship with a twenty-four-year-old widow named Faustina Antonini—the first sexual encounter of Goethe's, Boyle tells us, for which there is documentary evidence. The anguish that the poet felt upon being forced to return to Weimar in June of 1788, which he later compared to Ovid's feelings on being expelled from Rome by Augustus, may have been caused as much by the loss of Faustina as by any love of the city.

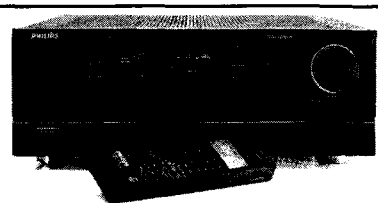
However that may be, it was not long before Goethe had taken into his house Christiana Vulpius, the orphaned daughter of a clerk in the highway department, who worked in a factory for the making of artificial flowers. Despite the chagrin of Charlotte von Stein, who said spitefully that he had given himself completely to a "girl who used to be a common whore," he lived happily with Christiana for the rest of her life, celebrating their love in the cycle *Roman Elegies* (poems that Boyle describes as being of "astounding energy and novelty," demonstrating "the capacity for simultaneous renewal and rebirth"), and finally marrying her, in 1806.

Goethe's abandonment of the poetry of desire was completed by a brief return to Italy in 1790. This time it took only a few days for the old illusions to be dispelled and for him to acknowledge that this was no Arcadia but a place of decaying statuary, flea-infested caravanserais, and streets pullulating with pickpockets. He wrote:

*Schön is das Land! doch ach, Faustinen find' ich nicht wieder.
Das ist Italien nicht mehr, das ich mit Schmerzen verließ.*

(Fair is the land! but alas, I cannot find the like of Faustina again.
This is no longer the Italy I left in anguish.)

Implicit in these words, as in the final act of the drama *Torquato Tasso*, was a turning away from his previous work and a suggestion that it would be replaced by a more limited, impersonal, and objective poetry, whose success, Boyle concludes, would require Goethe's return to the real world of "Germany, Weimar, Christiana, and all the strange tense and partial fulfillments they brought." □



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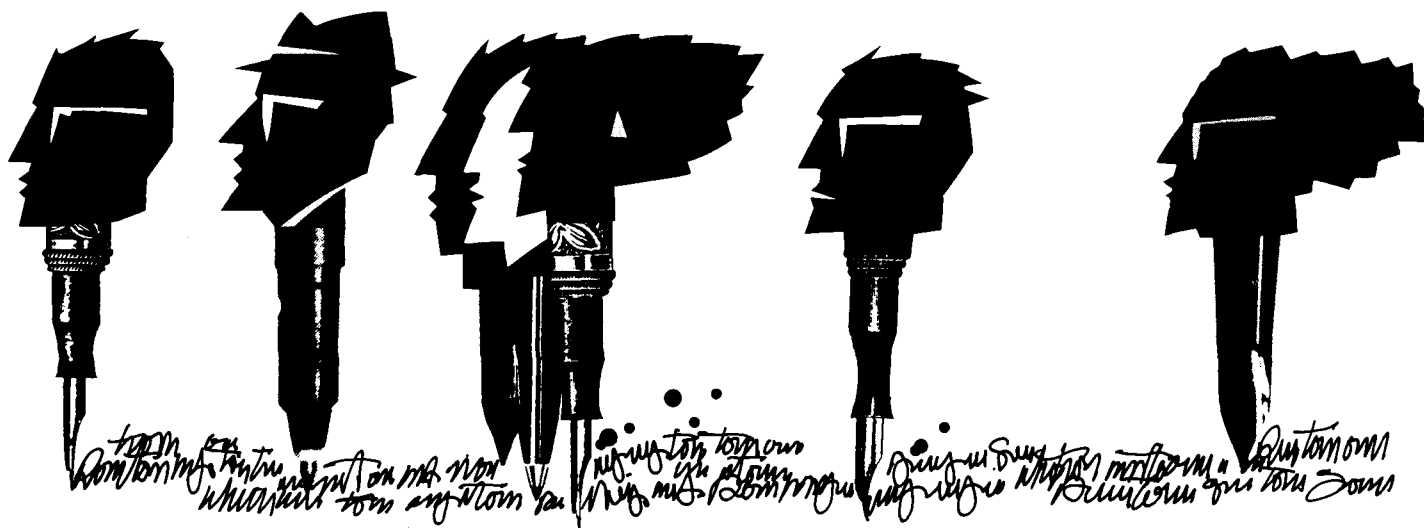
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With One Voice

by Barbara Wallraff

STYLE: TOWARD CLARITY
AND GRACE

by Joseph M. Williams.
University of Chicago, \$17.95.

I BEGAN TO be disenchanted with radical-left politics, in college, when I noticed that the Young Socialists and the Maoists and the Trotskyists seemed to spend more time arguing fine points with one another than they spent lifting up the masses out of their oppression. I drifted away, eventually discovering a different cause: the English language, whose principles I have sworn on a stack of reference books to try to uphold. Many consider this cause to be exclusionary and implicitly right-wing. Perhaps naively, I think of it as quite the opposite, standard English being both a club that anyone may join and one that gives its members license to converse with all the other members. But never mind. In this field, too, I mean to say, the insiders seem to spend an awful lot of time arguing with one another.

Having said that, and having set out to review a book called *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*, am I left with anything to do but praise it?

Joseph M. Williams, as a professor of English and linguistics at the University of Chicago, a communications consultant to law firms, corporations, and

government agencies, and the author of *The Origins of the English Language* in addition to three previous, college-textbook editions of *Style*, comes well-credentialed to the task of helping a general readership write better—the aim of this new edition of *Style*, which is brought to us by the publishers of the *Chicago Manual of Style* and of Kate Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. The general readership that Williams has in mind, to judge by the kinds of examples of bad and good writing presented in the book, is substantially made up of lawyers, scientists, academics, business people, and bureaucrats. Excellent. Some members of each of these groups certainly do need help with writing, in large part because they overburden their nouns and quell their verbs, leaving the language inert and senseless on the page: nobody in the prose does anything, usually nobody and nothing capable of doing anything is even present, and the abstractions remaining simply *are*.

Williams presents a number of arguments that seem designed to get the word torturers to stop, and offers them a variety of clever techniques to use in torture's stead. For instance, he recommends that writers think of their subject in terms of characters and action:

Stories are among the first kinds of continuous discourse we learn. From the time we are children, we all tell stories to achieve a multitude of ends—to amuse, to warn, to excite, to inform, to explain, to persuade. Storytelling is fundamental to human behavior. No other form of

prose can communicate large amounts of information so quickly and persuasively. At first glance, most academic and professional writing seems to consist not of narrative but of explanation. But even prose that may seem wholly discursive and abstract usually has behind it the two central components of a story—characters and their actions. There are no characters visible in (5a), but that doesn't mean there aren't any; compare (5b):

5a. The current estimate is of a 50% reduction in the introduction of new chemical products in the event that compliance with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice becomes a requirement under proposed Federal legislation.

5b. If Congress requires that the chemical industry comply with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice, we estimate that the industry will introduce 50% fewer new products.

He goes on to explain that characters need not be flesh-and-blood ones, as "Congress" and "we" are in 5b. They may even, he writes, be concepts or theories—a concept that he elaborates skillfully. He has many such concepts and elaborations. For example, he explains when to avoid nominalizations, or nouns derived from verbs, and when not to; in what order to present the parts of ideas so that the overall train of thought will roll smoothly along; the importance of summing up the point of paragraphs and documents, and of doing so in particular places. All this, and other concepts less easily encapsulated, lead one to be-

lieve that *Style* has every prospect of reforming those word torturers who want to be reformed.

WHILE APPLAUDING the job Williams is doing, though, I'd like to correct the impression he tries to give that he is the only man to do it. He starts trying at the very outset of Chapter One, striding into the drawing room of the standard-English club and throwing down the gauntlet before his august fellow members William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White:

This is a book about writing clearly. I wish it could be short and simple like some others more widely known, but I want to do more than just urge writers to "Omit Needless Words" or "Be clear." Telling me to "Be clear" is like telling me to "Hit the ball squarely." I know that. What I don't know is how to do it. To explain how to write clearly, I have to go beyond platitudes.

Sneering at rules from *The Elements of Style* as platitudes is something like ridiculing Shakespeare for all the clichés. It is a gaffe, and Williams doesn't stop there: he also makes rude noises about John Simon, "Pop Grammar-ians" in general, and H. W. Fowler. As it happens, I agree with one or two of these negative opinions. But surely it is unwise of Williams to express them in his book, for by doing so, he practically begs his readers to ask, What does *he* have to say that's so new? Is the characters-and-action conceit very different from what one would get out of Strunk and White's rules "Use definite, specific, concrete language" and "Write with nouns and verbs," together with the explanations and examples that follow them? Is it fair to ridicule Strunk and White's "Omit needless words" and then devote a chapter to "Concision"? It's not as if Strunk and White issued that pronouncement oracle-like and then changed the subject; they followed up their concise rules with explanations and examples, just as Williams follows up the "straightforward principles—not rules" that he gives.

Strunk and White's is probably the best known of all how-to books on writing and is, of the books Williams derides, the one whose intent is most similar to *Style*'s. (A less well known book that readers of this review may

enjoy is *The Use and Abuse of the English Language*, by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, a thoughtful and detailed how-to that was originally published, in 1943, under the title *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*.) Let's therefore borrow from Williams a technique that he uses throughout his book, and compare passages from his book and Strunk and White's:

Shift important information to the right. Moving the important information to the end of a sentence is another way to manage the flow of ideas. And the sentence you just read illustrates a missed opportunity. This is more cohesive and emphatic:

Another way you can manage the flow of ideas is to move the most important information to the end of the sentence.

In fact, this is just the other side of something we've already seen—how to move old information to the beginning of a sentence. Sentences that introduce a paragraph or a new section are frequently of an *X is Y* form. One part, usually older information, glances back at what has gone before; the other announces something new. As we have seen, the older information should come first, the newer last. When it doesn't, we can often reverse the order of subjects and what follows the verb. . . .

[*Style*]

And,

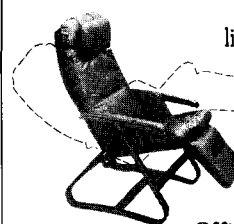
18. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

The proper place in the sentence for the word or group of words that the writer desires to make most prominent is usually the end. . . . The word or group of words entitled to this position of prominence is usually the logical predicate—that is, the *new* element in the sentence. . . . The principle that the proper place for what is to be made most prominent is the end applies equally to the words of a sentence, to the sentences of a paragraph, and to the paragraphs of a composition.

[*The Elements of Style*]

I didn't want to be completely subjective about the relative merits of these passages—the standard-English club is a democratic place—and so I conducted a little, unscientific survey that consisted of asking people which they found clearer. Frankly, I was sur-

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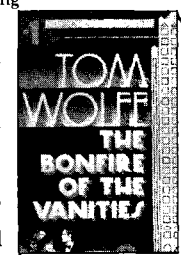
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prised that *The Elements of Style* didn't win hands down. Democracy is like that. Some of the people said appreciative things about both passages, one was as intemperate toward Williams ("You can't see the forest for the trees") as Williams is toward Strunk and White, and one was equally intemperate toward both ("In their own ways, both writers are too busy showing off").

Everyone seemed to agree, however, that the two passages make much the same point. Thus the difference between them comes down to a matter of style. When one is comparing books titled *Style* and *The Elements of Style*, this is no small thing. For these books not only are about writing but *are* writing, teaching by example as well as precept.

For myself, I much prefer the style of, the example set by, a how-to book

that forgoes sniping at its fellows and devotes itself singlemindedly to lifting up the masses of words out of their oppression. Still, Williams is not my enemy—or Strunk and White's. Our common enemy is thoughtless, careless writers and whoever has let many thousands of them ooze out the top of America's education system, whoever has let millions slip illiterate out the bottom of that system, and whoever in the education system is now perpetuating those two groups.

In the face of such a large and diffuse enemy, it seems to me, the standard-English club would do well to show some solidarity. I'll do my part: Buy Williams's book. And dig out from storage your dog-eared old copy of *The Elements of Style*. Set them side by side on your reference shelf, browse them often, and keep your membership up-to-date. □

consequence densely filled with generalized, and valuable, information, but offers almost no sense of what Arab people are like as people.

TYPICAL AMERICAN by Gish Jen. Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95. Ms. Jen's tragicomic novel concerns a Chinese immigrant to the United States. Ralph (he gets the name by chance) is the son of a stern scholar and proposes to escape by finishing his engineering education abroad. Times change, the money ceases to arrive, and Ralph has a hard and lonely time until his older sister locates him. Theresa—alias Know-It-All—is more efficient than Ralph. She marries him to her friend Helen and the three set up a proper Chinese cooperative household. Their collisions with American society are amusing and disconcerting and bizarre, but they make steady, if slow, progress toward prosperity. Ralph acquires tenure, Theresa is well on her way to becoming a doctor, and Helen is happy with two daughters and what seems to be, from the author's wryly deadpan description, a rather horrid house in a rather ugly suburban development. As long as the Changs retain their ancestral habits of frugality, industry, and scholarship, things go well. When they fall in with an assimilated countryman who proposes to teach them the true American way, everything falls apart. Ms. Jen has written a sad story with comic episodes, and her style is deftly adjusted to that mixture, shifting unobtrusively from mischievous gaiety in the opening pages to cool sobriety in the final chapters.

DARK STAR by Alan Furst. Houghton Mifflin, \$22.95. The hero of this grim but absorbing novel is a Polish Jew by birth, a respected foreign correspondent for *Pravda*, and a wary survivor. He is naturally expected to do occasional small favors for Soviet intelligence, and these escalate, in 1937, into full-fledged espionage. André has no wish to become a spy-master, but in a society where any trifling disobedience can be fatal, he dares not refuse. The business proves to be even worse than he expected. It involves multiple passports, long hours of struggle with codes, elaborate dodges to elude possibly imaginary tails, and constant tension arising from uncertainty as to who his employers really are. There is, he

Brief Reviews



I REMEMBER NOTHING MORE by Adina Blady Szwajger. Pantheon, \$20.00. When Warsaw fell, in 1939, Dr. Szwajger was a twenty-two-year-old medical student who, as a Polish Jew, went to work in the children's hospital serving the infamous ghetto. Later on she was smuggled to the Aryan side, where, with other young people of "good" (translation: non-Jewish) looks, she became a courier for the Jewish resistance. The hospital work, conducted by a small staff with inadequate supplies, was agonizing, because most of the patients died and those who did not were destined for murderous Nazi hands. The courier job was constantly dangerous, with the possibility of arrest and torture overhanging every move. In both positions circumstances forced Dr. Szwajger to contrive merciful deaths. The author makes no attempt to reconstruct everything that happened. She describes the episodes and people that remain clear in her memory, and therefore her account of those terrible days becomes a series of sharply drawn, deeply moving

vignettes, held together by the courage and determination of the participants. The book is also a kind of catharsis, for the euthanasia she was obliged to perform has haunted the author throughout her life. She was a doctor for forty years after the war, "But somewhere underneath I thought that I had no right to carry out my profession. After all, one does not start one's work as a doctor by leading people not to life but to death."

A HISTORY OF THE ARAB PEOPLES by Albert Hourani. Harvard University Press, \$24.95. Mr. Hourani (Emeritus Fellow, St. Antony's College, Oxford) concentrates his attention on Islamic theology (which proves to be as much subject to sectarian debate as the Christian kind), on patterns of commerce, on agricultural methods, on the growth of cities, and on the reasons for varying developments in the various sections of the Arab world. He has little interest in individuals beyond their ideological positions, and none at all in illustrative anecdote. His substantial history is in

soon realizes, a power struggle going on within the Soviet intelligence service, and while somebody, somewhere, thinks him worth preserving, somebody somewhere else wants him dead. Meanwhile, he carries out orders, and events proceed at a brisk pace. The book contains practical detail, such as how to hide documents neatly, and well-drawn minor characters, like the elderly Frenchwoman delighted to lend her apartment for what she thinks is detection of a sexual scandal in high places. The Nazi invasion of Poland is described with savage conviction. Underlying all the comings and goings and snoopings and shootings is the author's idea of what went on behind the scenes in the early days of the Second World War, and this foundation gives the tale an intellectual interest uncommon in the espionage genre.

GREEN MAN by William Anderson with photographs by Clive Hicks. HarperCollins, \$14.95. The green man is the ornamental motif of a human head sprouting, ingesting, or disgorging vegetation—usually some sort of tree. While studying Gothic cathedrals, Mr. Anderson was impressed by its prevalence, and he has attempted to trace its origins and meanings. The origins are obscure and the meanings plausibly multiple. Mr. Anderson's conclusions, provocative but unprovable, are presented with disarming enthusiasm. Mr. Hicks's photographs, indispensable to the discussion, show green men who smile, sulk, sneer, and threaten—leafy faces of such power and distinction that they surely must have indicated something beyond simple decoration.

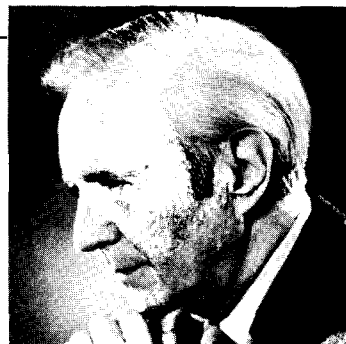
FESTIVAL FOR THREE THOUSAND MAIDENS by Richard Wiley. Dutton, \$18.95. This is yet another novel about a young man's search for adult identity, unusual because the youth in question is a Peace Corps volunteer sent to teach English in a small town in South Korea. Korean academic protocol, including stag parties where everyone gets roaring drunk, Korean politics, and Korean courtesy to the elephantine oddity dropped among these people do wonders for the fat, shy, uncertain American. They also entertain the reader.

WANDERING GHOST by Jonathan Cott. Knopf, \$24.95. Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) is an author remembered today,

according to Mr. Cott, only by a few devotees of ghost stories and by a large number of Japanese who value his affectionate descriptions of their country. Mr. Cott set out to remedy unjust neglect by compiling a Hearn anthology, but soon decided that much of Hearn's work would be less than comprehensible without the man's background. "The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn" therefore became about half Hearn's journalism, fiction, and travel writing and half Mr. Cott's biography of him. Hearn was born on the island of Leucadia, north of Ithaca, to a Greek mother and an Irish father whose military career left small scope for domesticity. The boy was whisked off to grimly pious relatives in Ireland, who, when it was realized that Lafcadio would never become their kind of good Catholic, simply cast him adrift. At the age of nineteen, small, penniless, friendless, blind in one eye and myopic in the other, he washed up in Cincinnati, Ohio. His assets were courage, wide reading, a knowledge of French, and what must have been a powerful gift of the gab. He became a gadfly journalist specializing in the kind of subjects normally swept under the Victorian rug, with a style that foreshadowed Kipling in the use of precise but unexpected detail. From Cincinnati he moved to New Orleans and then to Martinique, and finally headed for Japan, traveling, as usual, with everything he owned in two battered bags. He fell instantly in love with Japan and spent the rest of his life there, teaching English, writing fiction, explaining Japanese culture to Western readers, and sending nasty letters to old friends and publishers. He even acquired wife, children, house, furniture, and citizenship. It was a remarkable end for a remarkable nomad, whose story Mr. Cott presents with sympathy.

THE NEW YORKER BOOK OF CAT CARTOONS Knopf, \$16.95. In what appears to be a television interview, a pipe-smoking author says, "I know a lot of people will say 'Oh, no—not another book about cats.'" That author is a cat, and like most of his kinfolk in this thoroughly amusing collection of drawings, he is getting the better of his human associate.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



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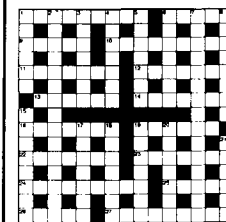
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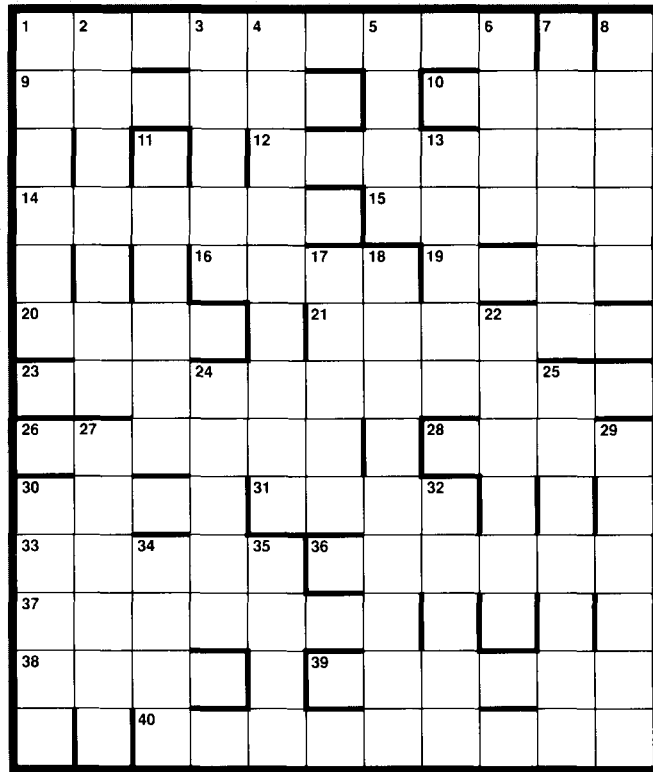
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THE PUZZLER

BY EMILY COX AND HENRY RATHVON

OFFERINGS

Answers to the six italicized clues are offered to solvers as gifts, along with an unclued, explanatory two-word salutation at 40 Across. All else is normal. Answers include five proper nouns.



The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 96.

ACROSS

1. Cases of strikebreaking poets? (9)
9. Marginal quiet spells for pens (6)
10. South African fighter losing heart (4)
12. Steal the show from a guest, rudely grabbing piano (7)
14. Desires object belonging to Fidel's comrade (6)
15. *Stogie upset Craig* (5)
16. For the most part, tolerate Ollie's partner (4)
19. Nobody's spoken for sisters (4)
20. Farm, before (4)
21. Bill's taking in island sounds (6)
23. *Company C varied milk at nine with an assortment of nuts* (8,3)
26. Wagon's loaded with a jeweler's weights (6)
28. Buddy married date, perhaps (4)
30. *Handshake of silly prig* (4)

31. One riding in cool old jalopy (4)
33. Musketeer's feeling of pity after beheadment (5)
36. Guard ready to eat small crabs (6)
37. *Copper tossed on his pillow* (7)
38. Rowboat out of water carries nothing (4)
39. Part of Arabia fragmented part of Nigeria (6)

DOWN

1. *Blossom failing farther down* (6)
2. *Time* article held by villain in play-ending event (7)
3. Oddly, ballad has feeling of ennui (5)
4. *Bum leg Bub reset is something to chew on* (6,3)
5. Check for weapons, eliminating foremost danger (4)
6. Quite a past in melodrama (4)
7. Ask individual to go fly a kite (8)
8. Groups of sailors sail in the sound (5)
11. By looking funny, Jack lost (6)
13. Mauritians holding Patty Hearst (5)
17. Flavoring in sea crackers (5)
18. Candy on peel eaten by none (9)
22. Seafood swindle by Greek character (6)
24. Wizard's home in tree, up with musical toy (5)
25. Quickly crams minimal legroom (7)
27. Maker of gold god among the Norse (6)
29. Camels chewed cactus (6)
30. Indecent word in *Howl* (5)
32. Go head over heels, topsy-turvy, about a Middle Eastern dish (5)
34. Dance music for a choir, within limits (4)
35. Boom box (4)

NOTE: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped envelope to 'The Atlantic Puzzler, 745 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

WORD WATCH

BY ANNE H. SOUKHANOV

bright-collar *adjective and noun*, of, relating to, or being a knowledge worker born after 1945 who has a preference for independent work and decision-making: "Bright-collar workers may need new ways of organizing work—greater autonomy and flexibility, more unstructured time for communicating ideas and new social arrangements and interpersonal ties that foster it" (*Psychology Today*).

BACKGROUND: *Bright-collar*, which joins *blue-collar*, *pink-collar*, and *gold-collar* in the lexicon of the workplace, was coined by Ralph Whitehead, Jr., a professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Though conceived in the 1970s, the term *bright-collar* began to be used in print only in 1988, primarily in connection with *bright-collar voters* and the national elections. "Bright-collar people lack the touchstones that guided white-collar workers in the 1950s and 1960s," Whitehead has written. "The white collars believed in institutions; *bright collars* are skeptical of them. . . . Although the older white collars knew the rules and played by them, *bright collars* can't be sure what the rules are and must think up their own. The white collars were organization men and women; *bright collars* are self-entrepreneurs interested in building careers for themselves outside big corporations."

Here are a few of the words being tracked by the editors of The American Heritage Dictionary, published by Houghton Mifflin. A new word that exhibits sustained use may eventually make its way into the dictionary. The information below represents the first stage of research, not the final product.

canola *noun*, a genetically engineered variety of rapeseed used to produce a vegetable oil lower in saturated fats than all others and high in mono-unsaturates: "You can grow . . . *canola* most places wheat is grown. The plant's oil is all but tasteless, and perfect for a cholesterol-obsessed country—only 7% saturated fat, compared with 15% for soybean oil . . . and 51% for palm oil" (*Forbes*).

BACKGROUND: The word *canola*, an acronym for "Canada, oil low acid," was coined in 1978 by the Canadian seed-oil industry when a variety of the rape plant low in heart-damaging erucic acid was developed. *Canola* is Canada's second largest cash crop and is grown on 7 million acres there. A *canola* plant stands three feet tall and sprouts dozens of oblong seed-pods, each containing a half dozen or so small seeds. At harvest time the *canola* is cut and then dried; the seeds are separated from the pods and crushed to yield *canola oil*, a product approved in 1985 by the Food and Drug Administration for U.S. consumption. Although the health benefits of the oil are self-evident, U.S. farmers have yet to commit themselves to extensive plant-

ing of *canola*, because it, unlike the wheat with which it is interchangeable, is largely not a federally subsidized crop. Nonetheless, industry analysts forecast that by 1995 the United States will have 5 million acres of *canola* fields, and by the year 2000 will have 10 million.

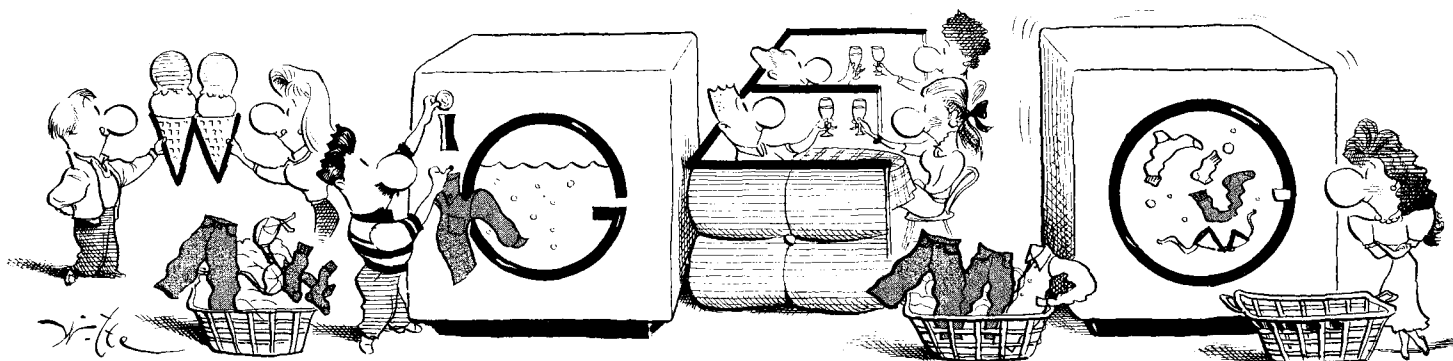
fruppie *noun, slang*, a young, upwardly mobile, religiously observant Jew, especially an Orthodox one: "Rabbis, sociologists and marketing consultants say the number of *fruppies* is growing as Jewish baby boomers return to their orthodox religious roots after experimenting with and rejecting other lifestyles" (Associated Press).

BACKGROUND: According to Ann Levin, who wrote the story cited here, the word *fruppie* derives from the Yiddish word *fromm*, meaning "religious," and elements of *yuppie*. One indicator of the numbers and taste of *fruppies* is a marked increase in the variety of kosher products available. According to Lubicom, the sponsor of the International Kosher Food Trade Show, the number of such products rose "from 1,000 in 1977 to 20,000 [in 1990]. At the same time, sales ballooned

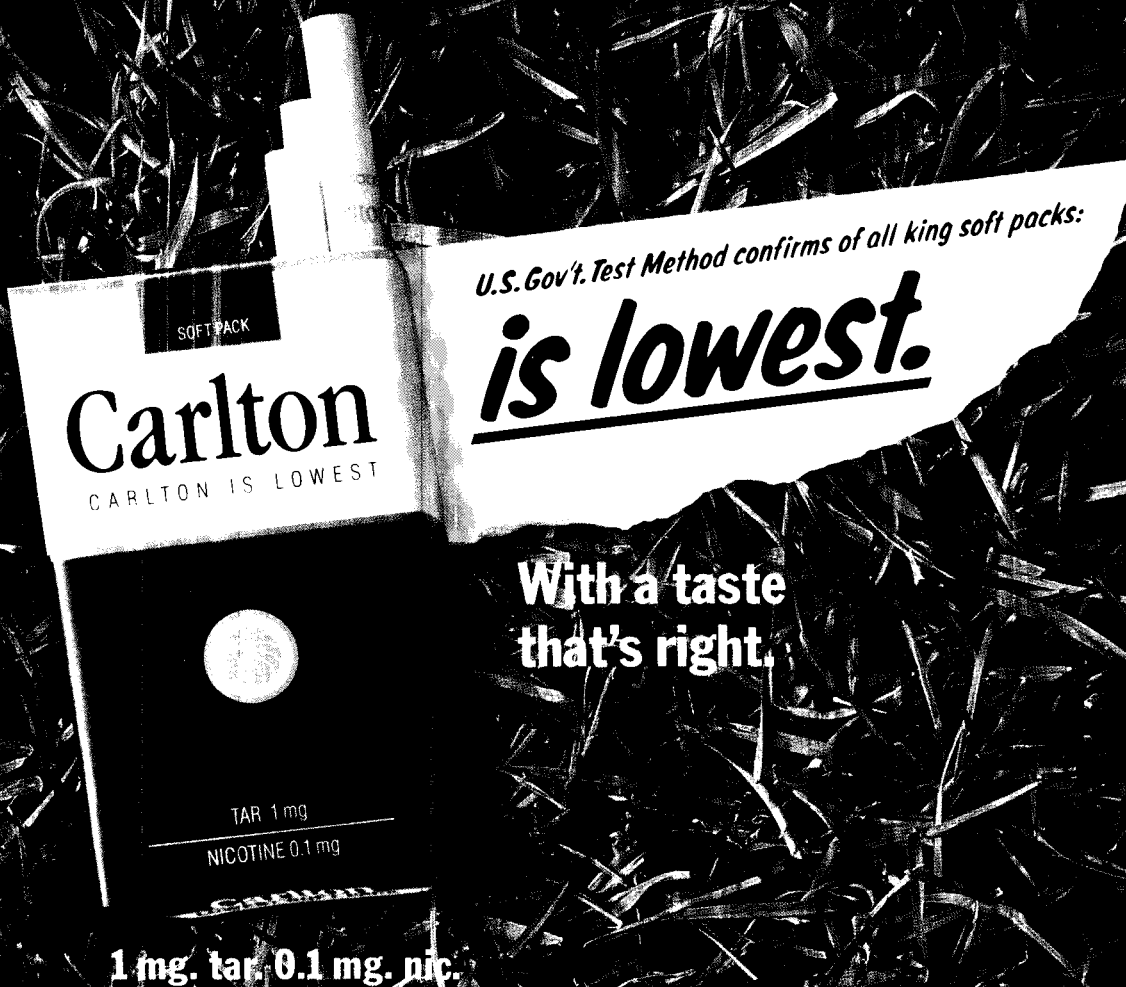
from \$290 million to \$1.75 billion a year as companies from Coors beer to Pepperidge Farm have been awarded kosher certification."

washing emporium *noun*, a coin-operated laundry incorporating such features as a bar, a restaurant, entertainment, a fax machine, mailboxes, a photocopier, a snack bar, a dining room, and a study area. Also called *slosh and wash*. "It was more or less a normal Monday night at Washbucklers, a 'washing emporium.' . . . With two tanning booths, a pool table, video games, a large overhead television screen, a comfortable lounge with romantic lighting and a wine-and-beer bar, all open until 11 nightly, it's a popular spot to hang out in" (*The Boston Globe*).

BACKGROUND: The coin-op laundry may prove to be "the new social center of the '90s," according to the owner of Washbucklers, David Cartero, of Rutland, Vt. These advanced laundries sometimes even offer matchmaking services. Dee Dee Mandino, the operator of a chain of Connecticut laundries, has held "Love at First Rinse" parties for "the squeaky clean singles," featuring a live disc jockey. According to the *Globe*, Mandino suggests the coin-op laundry as "a safe, less pressured alternative [for singles] where social barriers and façades are down."



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